UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

# Learning through experience. An analysis of student leaders' reflections on the 1985-6 revolt in Western Cape schools.

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the inter-relationship between theory and practice in a number of ways. I shall mainly be concerned with analysing the effects of participation in the 1985-6 Western Cape struggles upon the political consciousness of former student leaders.

A representative, random sample of the 1985 Student Representative Council members of a certain high school in Cape Town was taken and respondents were then interviewed individually during the last quarter of 1990.

The subject of the thesis is closely tied to the particular method used to investigate it. I shall argue and present reasons why the ethnographic interviewing commonly used in cultural anthropology is theoretically appropriate as means to collect empirical material for use in the analysis of the topic. Arising from the methodology, a secondary focus of this study concerns the interaction between the biases (or "theory") which social scientists bring to their research and the actual, raw data collected. This variation of the theory-practice nexus is not examined in detail, only when it is directly relevant to the main analysis.

How was all of the foregoing arrived at? I shall show that the interplay between action and thought was central to the

events which occurred during the 1985-6 rebellion. It is this fact which justifies the study of the above topic and which led to conceptualizing of the research as outlined. In addition, this same feature of the uprising can be used to examine the political consciousness of the ex-students. In other words, their present-day perceptions in regard to past experiences in mass struggle can be analysed in terms of the the boycott seen as action (practice) and the boycott seen as symbolising ideas (thought).

The main conclusion reached is that there is both a unity and a disjunction of theory and practice in the political outlook of respondents. On the one hand, interviewees understand and evaluated those events in which they directly participated. This was done in contradictory ways and showed a general move away from militancy towards conservatism. On the other hand, the great majority of respondents are still struggling to make sense of the wider social issues produced during the uprising. These aspects of respondent thinking are viewed in relation to one another and I try to give explanations for them.

Finally, I suggest what the contemporary significance of the above conclusions for the struggle for socialism could be.

**CONTENTS**

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ANC | : | African National Congress |
| ASSOCOM | : | Association of Chambers of Commerce |
| AZAPO | : | Azanian Peoples' Organisation |
| AZASM | : | Azanian Students' Movement |
| AZASO | : | Azanian Students' Organisation |
| CAL | : | Cape Action League |
| COSAS | : | Congress of South African Students |
| COSATU | : | Congress of South African Trade Unions |
| CPTA | : | Cape Professional Teachers' Association |
| DEC | : | Department of Education and Culture (House of Representatives) |
| DET | : | Department of Education and Training |
| FOSATU | : | Federation of South African Trade Unions |
| IRF | : | Inter-Regional Forum |
| ISCC | : | Inter-Schools' Co-ordinating Committee |
| NECC | : | National Education Crisis Committee |
| NEUSA | : | National Education Union of South Africa |
| NSC | : | National Sports' Congress |
| NUM | : | New Unity Movement |
| NUSAS | : | National Union of South African Students |
| PAC | : | Pan-Africanist Congress |
| PTSA | : | Parent-Teachers'-Students' Association |
| RETSAC | : | Retreat-Steenberg Action Committee |
| SAC | : | Student Action Committee |
| SACOS | : | South African Council on Sport |
| SACP | : | South African Communist Party |

SADF : South African Defence Force

SANSCO : South African National Students' Congress

SASO : South African Students' Organisation

SASPU : South African Students' Press Union

SOYA : Students of Young Azania

SPCC : Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee

SRC : Students' Representative Council

TLSA : Teachers' League of South Africa

UCT : University of Cape Town

UDF : United Democratic Front

UWC : University of the Western Cape

WCCAC : Western Cape Consumer Action Committee

WECSAC : Western Cape Students' Action Committee

WECSCO : Western Cape Students' Council

WECTU : Western Cape Teachers' Union

WPCOS : Western Province Council on Sport (provincial affiliate of SACOS)

# CHAPTER 1

## WHAT WAS INVESTIGATED AND WHY

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing, end them? ...
> (Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1)

### 1.1 THEORY AND PRACTICE

The aim of this research is to analyse aspects of the political consciousness of former Student Representative Council (SRC) members who were involved in the 1985-6 Western Cape schools' boycott. In other words I shall be concerned with the impact on present political opinion of past participation in struggle.[1] Below I show how a number of different writers have conceptualized this relationship between theory and practice in a variety of different ways. From this discussion the topic to be investigated is formulated. In Chapter 3 I demonstrate that the events which occurred during the boycott, whether they are now viewed individually and in isolation, or whether they are viewed as a whole and in sequence, epitomize the interrelationship between action and thought. In 1.2 below a review of the boycott literature suggests that a critical approach to the data gathered and to mass struggle generally is necessary. I start the

discussion by arguing that Marx's historical materialism can be interpreted as attempt to come to terms with how practice determines theory, the subject of discussion in this thesis.

In the well-known preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx writes about the "guiding principle" of his work as follows:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into relations, which are independent of their will ... The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence, but their social existence which determines their consciousness (1970: 20-1).

The motive force of history is the tension and conflict between the dynamic forces of production (i.e. conscious human activity, technology, the manner in which production is organised) and the lagging, conservative relations of production (i.e. the social conditions of labour, how surplus is appropriated and distributed, ideologies which rationalise and legitimise the manner in which people make a living). As a result of this contradiction society moves forwards or backwards and social revolutions are caused (Ibid: 21).

In theory, then, Marx linked consciousness to "material life". It therefore follows that the antithesis between the "economic" and the "non-economic", between the "base" and the "superstructure", is at the same time also the antithesis between the real world and its abstract reproduction in thought. In addition, it is crucial (as will become clear later) to point out the basic perspective and point of departure which lies at the heart of historical materialism and Marx's general philosophy: "In total contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven [i.e the ideal] to earth [i.e. the material], we here ascend from earth to heaven" (Marx, cited in Tucker, 1972: 177). In the nineteenth century the leading representative of German philosophy was Hegel who greatly influenced Marx but whom he also criticized. Hegel's "World Spirit", or "Absolute Idea" was something which had been conceived and created by his intellect. It acquired a life of its own as it, God-like, strutted the universe intervening in history and in the affairs of men and women.

> For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of `the Idea', is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought (Marx, 1976: 102).

It can therefore be seen why it has been the custom for marxists (and others) to place ideas and ideology in the

context of its political economy. The Western Cape boycotts of 1985-6 can thus be viewed as the product of the region's history and socio-economic system in much the same way as Kane-Berman (1978), writing from a liberal perspective, or Baruch Hirson (1979), writing from a marxist perspective, have described the 1976 revolt in Soweto. Such an approach could explain the uprising's specificity, its peculiarly local features and flavour. Yet what moulded people's ideas during the hurly-burly of the rebellion was not the development and unfolding of the forces of production in conflict with productive relations, but their "expression", viz. the events of struggle and the experience of participating in them. Hence, the kinds of questions I wish to explore concern what, if anything, happens to the thinking of, let us say a fifteen year old, when she is detained, or beaten up by the police, or repeatedly attends emotionally-charged rallies with six or eight thousand others, or sits in for weeks on end at "awareness programmes". In the same way one could very well ask what happens to the thinking of her worker-parents who previously had not bothered much about politics, had in fact steered well clear of it, when they come home one day and are told their daughter is in jail, or in hospital, or is (missing) "on the run" because of involvement in a boycott at school. Below is the bitter testimony of the man in whose house Shaun Magmoed, one of the Trojan Horse victims, died soon after he was gunned down by police in the streets of Athlone:

> Ek glo nie die hatigheid sal uit my uit gaan nie. My hatigheid is nou net omtrent so sterk lat ek nogal dink dat ek sal doodgaan met daardie hatigheid teenoor daardie mense wat so kinders doodskiet en aaklig seerskiet ... Nou hoe sterk moet die hatigheid nie wees nie vir die ouers nie wat rêrig hulle kinders verloor het nie, wat doodgeskiet gewees het nie? (cited in Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 89).[2]

It is possible to look at the connection between theory and practice from other angles as well and it was not only Marx who wrote about it. The troubled Prince of Denmark suffered much, slipping into insanity as he was forced to choose between the ideal and the real. Hamlet can be seen to embody the inability to integrate what could be called the good, virtuous light of reason and the blind passion of emotion, sensuousness and action. His painful dilemma and his immediate inability to decide ("Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ..." - Act 3, Scene 1) is thus symbolic of wider and more fundamental issues which Marx viewed in socio-economic terms.

D. H. Lawrence often spoke about this same subject, but in a sexual sense. Here is one of his characters in Women in Love:

> ... knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don't want to BE an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them ...

> ... your passion is a lie ...
> you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will, your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to KNOW. (1921: 45-6, emphasis in the original).

(The above also applies to the British society into which Lawrence was born; banning his books meant denying - in public anyway - the existence of "any dark sensual body of life".)

Lawrence often seems to associate sensuality with the irrational; the extracts also therefore seem to constitute an attack on the use and application of reason to human affairs. It may be noted that the relationship between sensuality and the intellect, or between the conscious and the unconscious does not necessarily have to entail a rejection of reason although in the case of Lawrence I tend to think that it does. It is commonly thought that this was what Freud accomplished. Carr (1964: 138-9), for example, argues that, on the contrary, what Freud did was to subject the unconscious to rational analysis: "This was an extension of the domain of reason, an increase in man's power to understand his environment; and it represents a revolutionary and progressive achievement" (Ibid: 139). After all, in psychoanalysis the world of dreams, of the absurd and the fantastic, is related to the real world in

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an analytically rational manner.

The subject of my inquiry can also be thought of in physiological terms. (There seems to be no end to the variations.) Going back further than the England of Shakespeare or the Germany of Hegel and Marx, Cornforth tells us that there are "primitive peoples" who view the human spirit or soul as being independent of the body and believe that it leads an existence separate from it, leaving the body through the mouth during sleep, for example. Hence the origins of the still widely held belief of the "soul" leaving the body after death and continuing to "live", albeit in a different realm. "Idealist [philosophies] ... are ... only refinements and rationalizations of such superstitions" for they conceive of the brain and the body as distinct entities (1977: 9). Animals, like small babies, have "consciousness" rooted only in sense-perceptions. The life functions of the brain in men and women originate in, and are dependent upon, the material, physiological functions of the organs of the body in relation to their natural and social environment (Ibid: 21, 30, 32). Reality enters the brain; consciousness and thought are the reflection of that reality. But this "reflection" is not of the passive, imitative kind we find when looking into a mirror and seeing our own images and actions replicated in it. The process is reciprocal: "Consciousness is in the first place a product of life activity, in the second place it is a product which plays a

major part in directing that very activity of which it is a product" (Ibid: 33, 34). Action produces thought; thought, action.

There may be life (of the soul) after death. Likewise, Hegel may long since have died, but his "spirit" (small s) lives on. Idealism as philosophy is, of course, still commonly recognisable in social science today, especially in history; it is particularly clearly illustrated in the study of high school history and literary criticism: the "genius" of Shakespeare and other writers can be understood by an examination of their work, extracts or texts of which must be "analysed". The times in which they lived are thrown in as an afterthought, as matters of additional "interest". The very conception of the "great writer" whose works are "universal", "eternal" and "valid for all time" in literature finds its parallel in the "great leader" (sometimes benevolent, sometimes not) in history. It is these "great leaders" who decide and formulate policies and determine the fate of nations (sometimes with the help of good, and sometimes with the help of bad, "advisors"). Thus both writer and leader come to stand above the past and above contemporary social life in the sense that they are unaffected by them - like myths concerning Robinson Crusoe. And thus their work too must be studied as though this is the case. Of course in as much as we are all the product of our social milieu we also have the ability to resist and transcend it. Yet in John

Donne's oft-cited words, "No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." From the moment that we are born the surrounding world shapes us: first in a primarily physiological sense we experience and sense the environment around us and respond to it; then in a more sociological way we learn language and our socialization starts. How could Robinson Crusoe have thought had he not known English? And what did knowing English mean? We are born into society.

I shall view what Marx calls "material life" as synonymous with the lived reality of social experience - activity, work, practice, political action. And my aim is to examine the relationship between the latter and thought. In the final analysis the two "aspects" cannot be separated; just like we cannot separate the pain we experience when hurt by a sharp object or the fact of the death of a loved one from a conscious perception thereof.

We may watch a film or a play or read a book which tells us about life and love and death and the struggles of oppressed peoples. And, if it is well done, we may be moved by the tale and empathise with the characters and the events. But our commonsense and everything we know about the world tells us that there is the world of difference between that and actual experience. There is nothing quite like the real thing, is there?

I have found Cornforth's lucid book a good introduction to this whole question of dialectical materialism from a philosophical and (interestingly) physiological point of view. Thompson's critique of Althusser is also relevant; I wish to conclude this section by quoting him at length as it helps clarify the aims of this study:

> Experience arises spontaneously within social being, but it does not arise without thought; it arises because men and women ... are rational and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world. If we are to employ the (difficult) notion that social being determines social consciousness, how are we to suppose that this is so? ... we cannot conceive of any form of social being independently of its organising concepts and expectations, nor could social being reproduce itself for a day without thought. What we mean is that changes take place within social being, which gives rise to changed EXPERIENCE and this experience is DETERMINING in the sense that it exerts pressures upon existent social consciousness proposes new questions, and affords much of the material which the more elaborate intellectual exercises are about ... (his emphasis).
>
> outside the university [or, for that matter, the formal school context] another kind of knowledge production is going on all the time. I ... agree ... it is not always rigorous ... [but] knowledges have been and still are formed outside the academic procedures. Nor have these been, in the test of practice, negligible. They have assisted men and women to till fields, to construct houses, to support elaborate social organisations, and even, on occasion, to challenge effectively the conclusions of academic thought ... People starve: their survivors think in new ways about the market. People are imprisoned: in prison they meditate in new ways about the law. In the face of such general experiences old conceptual systems may crumble and new problematics insist upon their presence

(Thompson, 1978: 8-9).

## 1.2 BOYCOTT LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of the boycott literature is to formulate, together with the discussion in the preceding section, the main problem areas that were subsequently investigated and, particularly, to suggest an approach as to how these tasks could best be accomplished.

There is strong (but for the most part IMPLICIT) evidence in the existing literature on student boycotts to support Thompson's views. Bloch (1988: 3) writes that "organisation is itself an educational process. In the heat of organisation and collective action, very real transformations occur. These are not transitory, but provide ideological, intellectual and practical lessons". Similarly, Molteno cites a teacher describing the following incident at an assembly of the whole school during the 1980 boycott:

> The students got up one by one and really pinned him [the principal] down. Their basic argument was how could he perpetuate the system and pretend to fight it. He was trying to tell them that he believes in peace, negotiation and dialogue - not in violence. One girl asked him: "How can you use dialogue against violence? Surely you are not going to tell me that the Government is not violent?" Mr Y [the principal] didn't

> know what to say. He couldn't defend himself. So the students put it to him: "Don't you think you should resign [from the CPTA]?" The meeting ended in some chaos with Mr Y saying he can't eat humble pie anymore - he'd had his fill of humble pie (1987: 9; see also T. Flederman in Millar & Philcox, 1980: 38-9).

The normal authority of the principal is challenged; violence as a means of protest is considered and so on. The context in which this takes place is crucial: thousands of students are boycotting, demonstrating in the streets, clashing with the police and, at times, with their parents, etc. The political "lessons" are driven home in a psychological atmosphere in which passions are intensely aroused.

Another example: early in August 1985 University of Cape Town (UCT) students at a mass meeting decided to march through the streets of Rondebosch. A battle between students and police followed. Dr Bertelsen, in a letter to the editor of the Cape Times, stated that the march had been preceded by what she called a "consciousness-raising" debate in which all views regarding the proposed march had been considered. The UCT SRC vice-president said that, as a result of their clash with the police (who had refused to allow this form of protest to proceed), students had learnt why the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC) had resorted to violence after Sharpeville.

He added that the incident further highlighted what white students would be doing when they are conscripted into the army (Pratt, 1988: 121).

In sum, participation in protest and in "action" gives rise to situations and contexts in which consciousness can be "raised". I do not wish to challenge the latter assertion; indeed in Chapter 3 I shall use it to interpret the events which occurred during the 1985-6 rebellion. However, these ideas are closely tied to a major weakness common in most of the literature, viz. that the FACTS and EVENTS of opposition are good in themselves and hence no critical questions need to be asked of them.[3] (A possible implication is that the job of the historian is merely to chronicle, or as it were enumerate them - see, for example, Hall's article). Lodge (1983: 336) rejects Hirson's criticisms of the 1976 student leadership in Soweto by asking how "things could have been otherwise". In so far as this refers to particular circumstances and events he may well have a point; but what is of concern is the untenable assumption that things can NEVER be otherwise. The acceptance of such an assumption easily leads to the construction of <u>a posteriori</u> arguments which seek to legitimise whatever form and content opposition to the <u>status quo</u> takes.

In a sense all this is implicit in the nature of things: if one rejects inferior education one implies acceptance of

equality; if one rejects detention without trial one implies acceptance of the right of free political opposition, etc. Opposition per se is intrinsically "good" because it hits out at injustice. Maurice (1981: 17) writing about the 1980 boycott, says that for most students:

> ... it was ... a new ... enriching experience, which did much to lower their threshold to tolerance for injustice and discrimination, and to heighten their level of political consciousness; to increase their growing rejection of authority merely because it was authority ... to become more self-assured, more assertive, more questioning, more independent, more self-disciplined, more serious and more responsible; to develop the qualities needed for leadership, and to learn valuable lessons in organisation and the pursuit of common objectives. Their insistent and continuing demand for the establishment of student representative councils at all high schools provides the clearest evidence of all this.

In so far as these sentiments (commonly found in the literature), and particularly the manner in which they are expressed, demonstrate a sympathy for the cause of the oppressed in their struggle, I wholeheartedly endorse them. However, the author can find little wrong with the boycott, except a few remarks made in passing (Ibid: 17) and these are listed rather than analysed. In short a critical perspective is lacking.

The obvious danger of such approaches is that they can lead to romanticized or propagandist accounts in which

everything the "people" or the "oppressed masses" embark upon is regarded as momentous and "progressive". Victories abound - always and everywhere in favour of the poor. There is no room for criticism either academically (in terms of generating new theory about these uprisings) or politically. Regarding the latter, is it not desirable to assess actions in order, next time, to improve them, in order, next time, not to make the same mistakes? Bundy (1989: 213), after describing what he regards as some of the gains and positive features of the boycott, writes that student action in 1985 was often characterised by "immediatism" which he defines as "an impatient anticipation of imminent victory, unrealistic assessment of progress made, and the underestimation of the extent of student power ... " The political cost, he says, was demoralisation and disarray. A good example of the romantic/propagandist approach is Bloch's article (see also ROAPE, 1985; Chisholm, 1986; Lodge, 1986; Stobo & Morlan, n.d.; Maurice, 1981: 17; Levin, 1980; Brooks & Brickhill, 1980; WIP, 1980a; Barrell in Johnson, 1988; Johnson in Johnson 1988; Naidoo in Johnson, 1988 and - in places - Mufson, 1990). It results in him making claims which are based on errors of fact and which constitute gross exaggerations. For example, he writes that "(WECSCO) representatives of schools took mandates after METICULOUS DISCUSSION ON A CLASSROOM BY CLASSROOM BASIS" (emphasis added, 1988: 6). Jordi (1987: 61; 71-2) and even Molteno (1983: 300-302) have provided considerable evidence to the

contrary.

This assumption that somehow anything generated from below, coming from "the people" must automatically be worthwhile and therefore beyond criticism takes very many forms. For example, Lazarus (1983: 137-142) describes in this way the suggestions of the students she worked with in regard to what the aims of education should be and other issues related to curriculum, discipline, teaching methods and so on. The very idea that valid knowledge, forms of struggle, etc. can come from the under classes is explored more fully in the last chapter. Here I simply wish to note it and add that it is often implied that such notions derive further legitimacy from the fact that they are viewed as being "democratic", i.e. authored by the (downtrodden) majority. It is in this general context that I agree with the perspective of Seekings (1986: 22-3) when he comments critically on White's (1986) otherwise extremely useful discussion on consumer boycotts. He says, "The CONTENT of mobilisation and politicization and the terms of class alliances are often as important as the process itself (Ibid: 22, emphasis added). In other words, the fact that mobilisation or politicization occurs does not preclude a critical evaluation thereof.

A related weakness in the literature is the tendency to see the people as always united (see this tendency in Mufson, 1990, for example). True, popular struggle is normally

accompanied by a popular unity. Without wishing to contradict this statement, during 1985 division on a host of issues proceeded along two lines: there was struggle within organisations and amongst organisations on tactical and ideological matters. We know very little about these aspects of the boycott. What is important for the present discussion is that recognition of this can lead to a critical comparison of the various stances adopted at various times. Cameron's work (1984, 1986) on the opposition to the introduction of Bantu education in Cape Town is particularly useful in this regard (see also Nasson, in Lodge & Nasson et al, 1991). While I do not agree with some of Cameron's conclusions and question some of the empirical evidence he uses, his comparative analysis of the responses of different political organisations to the common problem they faced is useful in terms of advancing the critical outlook advocated here. The same applies to Anthony Marx's work (1992) whose focus is one the broad liberatory movement between 1960 and 1990 and not only on student resistance. There is a general bias of seeing the world through the prism of what could be criticized as an idealist, clash-of-ideas approach. But this is also the book's strength, especially when one views it in regard to the present discussion and argument: one gains a strong sense of the different tendencies within and between organisations, of how issues are thrashed out and contested, without necessarily being settled once and for all at any particular stage as the struggle develops.

To plead for a critical appraisal of the elements which constitute mass revolt in the above sense in no way implies abstention from it; neither does it necessarily have to entail its denigration. Molteno (1979a: 57) describes Bob Hitchcock's work, Flashpoint South Africa, on the 1976 uprising (among other things) as "contemptible". A harsh judgement, but with good reason: Hitchcock, for example, says that the state should have "nipped in the bud the creeping, poisonous influence of communism ... " and refers to black protesters as being "under the influence of liquor or dagga or a mind-bending combination of both" (cited Ibid: 57). Despite his anti-apartheid opinions, Hitchcock's book abounds with conspiratorial theses, communist plots and - despicably - racism (see, for example, ch 13). In a similar way Buthelezi has heaped vituperation upon the "activists sitting in white newspaper offices", "scrawny, scraggly, tattered cockerels", trade unionists and "long-haired intellectuals" (cited in WIP, 1980b: 35, 36) who are "behind" student rebellions. (The difference between Buthelezi and Hitchcock is that the former is able to use his impis in Inkatha to intimidate, abduct and terrorize his opponents in ways that must be only too familiar in the dark portals of the ministry of Law and Order - see WIP, 1980b 37-9; CIIR, 1988: ch 5; Brewer in Johnson, 1988: 367-71; Mufson, 1990: 295-309). In a word, the approach advocated here is to examine mass revolt critically with the view to, or the prospects of, making it BETTER.

The notion that the facts of resistance are in themselves good, that there is nothing wrong with them and that next time round all that is needed is a repetition and replication of the form of previous opposition, is very similar to some of the ideas which underpinned major trends in nineteenth century, European historiography. The founder of modern, positivist historical writing, Leopold von Ranke, was a product and representative of the nineteenth century Romantic movement which stood in firm opposition to the rationalism of the eighteenth century and the accompanying rise of the bourgeoisie before, during and after 1789. Ranke's philosophy of history is (and was) famous for its supposed neutrality and objectivity: the task of the historian was not to take sides, to pass judgement or to moralise by praising here, condemning there; it was merely to show "wie es eigentlich gewesen (how it actually was)". Hence, the empirical, the facts and events, were stressed whereas interpretation was studiously avoided. Yet, this was in itself an expression of definite beliefs and present-mindedness - the very things the theory frowned upon and attacked. His ideas formally expressed notwithstanding, for Ranke, the past and the present were closely intertwined: the past had given rise to a legitimate present; in as much as there was little to criticise about the past so, too, there was little to criticise about the present. All were the will and revelation of God. The writing of history became a justification of how the (reactionary) status quo had come

to power and why it should not be opposed. It meant and implied that the events of the past had been inevitable. Ranke's philosophy of history was the answer and alternative to what the modern, nineteenth century intellectual stood for. These philosophes spoke French, travelled widely, conducted a prolific correspondence and frequented the fashionable salons in the towns. Ranke and the Prussian state could not forgive them for having embraced liberalism and for opposing the existing order, in so far as that order, as was the case with the Germany of the time, was backward-looking and wedded to a decaying feudal ancestry. It is ironic indeed that this liberal intelligentsia ALSO rallied to the bandwagon of empiricism and "the facts". But from very different perspectives to be sure. Man was capable of infinite progress and the immutable "laws" of the natural sciences had to be made applicable to the study of both man and society. It seemed pretty obvious that scientific knowledge was increasing man's control over his environment (thus resulting in "progress"), so why not in human affairs as well?

> The liberal 19th century view of history had a close affinity with the economic doctrine of laissez faire - also the product of a serene and self-confident outlook on the world ... The facts of history were ... a demonstration of the beneficent and apparently infinite progress towards higher things (Carr, 1964: 20).

While the ideologies which underpin them differ widely in

social milieu and content, much of the existing and mainstream literature on student boycotts and nineteenth century liberal and conservative historiography share a common empirical fetishism. In the same way, but for different reasons, each seeks (or sought) to legitimise the nature of things as they are (or were). Put another way, there being basically nothing wrong with the form and features of mass struggle, there is a strong tendency to merely describe these and not to critically evaluate them.

There is ONE aspect (albeit a crucial one) of the outlook on student boycotts of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), an affiliate of the New Unity Movement (NUM), which I wish to consider because it contrasts with the above and is directly related to the aims of this study. The organisation has tended, more often than not, to criticise student boycotts almost implying that it would have been better that they had not occurred and that nothing good can or could come from them (see, for example, 1990a: 3-4; 1990b). A distinction is drawn between what is described as the "kamikaze politics and the Masada complex" of student boycotts on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ideal that education can be made to be worthwhile, that schools should "remain bastions to equip the oppressed's children with skills and knowledge, values and ideals, and to defend them against indoctrination" (1985b: 3; see also TLSA, 1990a: 3; 1990b: 2). The two forms of struggle are viewed as mutually exclusive. This perspective fails to

distinguish between strategies which may be appropriate during "normal times" but not during times of sustained, national revolt. But more important is that uprisings of the kind which occurred during 1985-6 are not, in this view, regarded in terms of the potential they have and the opportunities they provide for liberatory organisations to swing the balance of forces in what is an extremely fluid, DEVELOPING situation in favour of the oppressed, thus opening up all kinds of possibilities - like turning national student protests into a revolt led by workers. When uprisings of this kind break out, nobody can beforehand or at the time predict where they will lead to, what the consequences may be. Charney (1980: 128) writes that the 1980 protests developed "from the parochial concerns of a few schools to a frontal attack on racial inequality in education". Popular revolts provide political organisations with circumstances which are very favourable for them to further their standpoints on a mass scale. One could also look at the matter from the perspective of a longer timespan: it is, for example, generally acknowledged that the 1976 uprising started off over opposition to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools, then developed into a national revolt against Apartheid, and then ushered in a new ERA of resistance - despite all the savagery of the state's repression.

Whereas the boycott literature (and Bloch's article in

particular) often tends, as was argued above, to assume that political consciousness is "raised" during mass uprisings; the TLSA tends in a a priori manner to deny any such possibility. It writes about the need for "a constant flow of informed, well-equiped, dedicated young men and women who are conscious of the historic tasks they have to carry out" and states that "Despite what the ruling class may INTEND to do inside the schools, it must be the bounden duty of teachers, parents and pupils to turn these weapons against the enemy ... by turning the schools into centres where education for liberation can be the real guiding spirit in TEACHING AND LEARNING (1985a: 3; emphasis in the original). Can this process, or the creation of mass political consciousness generally, not be achieved or furthered in the very act of revolt? It was my intention to find out.

For Carr (1964) insight into the study and writing of history belongs to the domain of the professional historian who must master certain skills, grapple with certain problems, etc. Such things are, no doubt, best learnt at universities, in libraries and amongst the blue books tucked away in the archives. I do not wish to imply that these (difficult) pursuits have no value; only that they can also be viewed as mass, and hence as social phenomena. To illustrate with specific reference to historical writing: Hosea Jaffe (1988) says in the Introduction to his seminal Three Hundred Years, first published in 1952 when

white South Africa was celebrating the tercentenary of Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape:

> The purpose of this history is to expose the process of the conquest, dispossession, enslavement, segregation and disfranchisement of the oppressed ... in order that the oppressed ... will understand better how to transform the status quo into a society worth living for and worth living in ...
>
> ... This study is not academic, but part of the knowledge of liberation.

To cite another, somewhat different example: one could refer to the attempts made by the newspaper, New Nation, during the 1980s to present an alternative view to the official versions of the South African past (see Mufson, 1990: 173-3). The notion of "ideas whose time have come" concerns the generation and production of popular knowledge. Like all other discoveries should the latter not also be tested, evaluated? What are the implications? - the political and social implications, more so than the scientific ones. Further, what is the relationship between (radical) social science and the ideas produced during the course of resistance? A critical review in a white newspaper of poems written by workers was met with the following angry remark by the poet Qabula, "My poems weren't dedicated to university people ... If it doesn't come across to you, you mustn't worry. It belongs to the working class. It doesn't belong to you" (cited Ibid: 179). I shall return to these questions in Chapter 7.

During 1980 two pamphlets expressing opposite views were circulated: one was entitled "We must have clarity before action"; and the other "We learn to do by DOING - so let's get on with our task" (Molteno, 1983: 346). In evaluating student consciousness, I hoped to discover five years after the event what, if anything, they had "learnt by doing"; but more especially, following from the above review of the boycott literature, to critically assess its quality and depth as well as what its significance for the future may be.

**NOTES**

1. For a good, engrossing account of the psychological effects of participation in struggle and involvement in violence, see Straker (1992).

2. I do not believe that the hatred I now feel will ever go away. This hatred I feel towards those people who so ruthlessly shot and killed children is so strong that I think it will remain with me until I die. Now how strong must it not be in the parents of the children who were actually shot?

3. There are notable exceptions from a variety of different points of view and emphases: Bundy, 1987, 1989; see also the approach in Anonymous, 1980b; Hirson, 1979: ch 15, for example; Hyslop, 1987a and Hyslop, 1987b,

especially 12-9; Moss, 1983; Callinicos & Rogers, 1978: 170-2, ch 10; Mafeje, 1978; Marx, 1992; Nekhwevha, 1992 and with specific reference to consumer boycotts, White, 1986; Seekings, 1986.

**CHAPTER 2**

**METHODOLOGY**

OLD LADY: Are you prejudiced?

AUTHOR: Madame, rarely will you meet a more prejudiced man nor one who tells himself he keeps his mind more open. But cannot that be because one part of our mind, that with which we act becomes prejudiced through experience, and still we keep another part completely open to observe and judge with?

OLD LADY: Sir, I do not know.

AUTHOR: Madame, neither do I and it may well be that we are talking nonsense (E. Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, cited by Elias, 1956: 226).

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 a reciprocal, inter-relationship between practice and theory in regard to participation in the boycott was suggested. This is ALSO a methodological problem: it concerns the interaction between the researcher and what is in his/her head and the real, raw, factual data he/she researches - the familiar question of bias. What I have set out to explore, therefore, is directly related to how it is to be done as both are variations of the same theme.

The following three matters are discussed below:

a) the question of bias in general with some reference to neo-marxist educational work as well as how the issue arises personally in this research. The discussion here can hardly be described as "in-depth" or "comprehensive". Nor was it meant to be; the aim was merely to pose the question in a general way and to work out a possible answer to it. Thus when the time came a guiding principle could be used and put into practice when collecting the empirical data;

b) from (a) above, I argue that methodologies associated with the participant observation used in cultural anthropology and ethnography are appropriate as means to collect the empirical data. The reasons are explained below;

c) from the above, a rationale for processing and presenting the data in a particular manner is suggested, thus outlining the plan of the thesis.

## 2.2 THE PROBLEM OF BIAS AND A POSSIBLE ANSWER TO IT

Most South Africans will, I think, agree that we live in times characterised by change and fluidity. Elias (1956) has argued strongly against scientific inquiry which is linked to the pressing problems of the present. He

questions the long-term and universal validity of such work. Social science should look at the present in terms of the future; at the past in relation to the present-future. Therein lies its validity and relevance. Referring to historical writing, Voltaire remarked, "If you have nothing to tell us except that one barbarian succeeded another on the banks of the Oxus and Jaxartes, what is that to us?" (cited in Carr, 1964: 88). The approach advocated by Elias is fundamentally a-historical: it assumes that it is possible (and desirable) for the inquirer to detach both himself and his work from its social milieu and historical context. In South Africa the pressure for academic work to be socially relevant is directly related to, and arises from, present crises and concerns for the future. New knowledge and theory can be generated in this way. Indeed, one of the hypotheses to be tested is whether knowledge and insight arose as a result of involvement in the 1985 school boycott. Moreover, Wexler (1983: 19) has pointed out that the "current critical discourse in education developed only in relation to successful collective action". While this may be true, there are nevertheless dangers in Wexler's alternative - a "universal 'radical' pedagogy" (Ibid: 35). He says, "we are going to be forced to pay increasing attention to educational practices that more directly articulate with the needs of particular collective movements" (Ibid: 36). According to Wexler (Ibid: 23), one must begin with specific struggles because society is the product of conflict arising from such struggles. He

advocates a direct involvement by researchers in these struggles. (Wexler's views are radical; others have advocated more or less the same thing, but from an essentially liberal point of view - see Pelto & Pelto, 1978: ch 10; Spradley, 1980: 17-20).

Like many other teachers, I witnessed some of the events I intend to describe; I also participated in some of them. Again like many others, I saw my role as influencing the thinking and actions of pupils, parents and colleagues. This was done at mass meetings, staff meetings, staff-SRC meetings and the few Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meetings our school organised during this period. Unlike what is suggested or implied by much of the boycott literature, many opposing views were aired at different times and a host of matters were hotly debated. Generally, I sometimes opposed certain actions, sometimes I was an exhausted, passive observer; sometimes I did not know how to respond; at most times my response was influenced by debate and discussion with colleagues and comrades. At times I was an active participant and organiser. At the start of the boycott I was favourably disposed to the general, extra-parliamentary movement for socio-economic change. Yet during the course of the boycott my own thinking and consciousness changed from one of critical sympathy to one of more active support for the students. This personal experience contributed to the way in which I have conceptualized this research.

The issue, then, is how the above involvement together with the views expressed in Chapter 1 will influence the research, in particular, whether certain interpretations will, a priori, be imposed on the data; whether, indeed, only such data which will confirm already existing presuppositions will be analysed. Hobsbawm (1973: 119) illustrates this problem as follows: The change from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production takes place by means of revolution. We know this "because Marx says so". If this were not the case, it would imply that progress did not always occur by means of revolution and hence there may be a point to liberal beliefs in gradualism and reform. Consequently marxists have tried to demonstrate that during the 1640s a bourgeois revolution occurred in Britain, that before this period the country was feudalist and that after it, it was capitalist. Hobsbawm remarks: "I do not say that the conclusions are wrong ... but this is no way of arriving at them. For if it turned out that the facts did not check with the conclusions, then we simply said, to hell with the facts".

Hargreaves (1982: 107) has accused contemporary marxist sociology of education of "theoretical closure and an absence of empirical rigour". He says that "the political cart has been placed before the social-scientific horse thereby crippling the horse in the process" (Ibid: 110). Of Anyon's work, for example, he says:

> there is no indication ... that theories have been TESTED by sensitive treatment of data, that evidence has been actively sought in such a way that it might disconfirm her existing hypotheses and assumptions; that competing possible explanations of particular selections of evidence have been rehearsed and compared, that the evidence has been used to GENERATE as well as test theory ... (Ibid: 114, his emphasis).

Similarly Gilmour (1989: 2) has criticized Molteno's work on the 1980 boycott by arguing that one is led to believe that the boycott was the same for all students, that "ALL students behaved in the same way and ALL teachers either responded to the boycott or were treated by students in the same way" (his emphasis). Furthermore, "Molteno's inability or unwillingness to pursue discrepancies or to check the veracities in the accounts of the actors hinders throughout his analysis ... it is difficult to see what tactical or strategic points can be learnt from such an account" (Ibid: 13). He suggests that at the root of the problem is the relationship between social science and the political commitments of its practitioners.

The problem of the relationship between empiricism/reality and its conceptual/interpretive/theoretical reproduction is one all social scientists have to grapple with. Thompson (1979: 6) captures this well as follows:

> In the old days ... when the philosopher ... came to this point in his argument, he

> looked ... for an object in the real world to interrogate. Very commonly that object was ... his writing table. 'Table', he said, 'how do I know that you exist, and if you do, how do I know that my concept, table, represents your real existence?'

In Chapter 1 an interactive relationship was postulated between mass action and political consciousness and the aim of the research is to investigate this in regard to the 1985 boycott. Methodologically, I propose, with Carr (1964: ch 1), Thompson (1978: 9), Hargreaves (1982: 120) and Schwartz & Schwartz (in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 92-3), a dialogue between theory and empirical evidence. In as much as the hypotheses and interpretations shape the data, so the data (and the value judgements which underpin their selection) must shape the hypotheses and interpretations. The interviewer is both "participant" and "observer"/social analyst. Evidence/data/facts are not in an absolute sense free from prior judgement (they are, after all, first processed by the researcher), but without empirical rigour, as has been shown, biased work is produced.

Wexler's idea of using research to further the aims of particular political groups must be rejected; it borders on propaganda production. In the preface to his grand History of the Russian Revolution Trotsky says:

> The reader ... is not obliged to share the political views of the author, which the

> latter on his side has no reason to conceal. But the reader does have the right to demand that a historical work should not be a defence of a political position, but an internally well-founded portrayal of the actual process of the revolution ... (1979: 20).

Hargreaves (1982: 121) has advocated a suspension of political commitment in order to prevent distortion and gain a greater degree of scientific objectivity. He argues very much like Trotsky as follows:

> there is no NECESSARY reason why value-free explanations of the consequences of different courses of action need to be translated into quasi-scientific endorsements of desirability or 'efficiency' of one course of action against another. Social science CAN be assessed by value-independent criteria ... without this ... disguising a set of covert, system-supportive value judgements (his emphasis).

The last caveat is crucial. I hope to suspend "commitment" only in the sense that it does not pursue a party-political or sectarian motive; not in the sense of abandoning the broad goals of the extra-parliamentary movement for social, political and economic change. The fact that writers have particular beliefs (or "commitment", or "involvement") which, moreover, others do not necessarily share, does not free them from the obligation to attempt, in work that has scientific pretensions, to produce well-founded, empirically verifiable research which takes opposing

evidence, theory and arguments into account. If "committed research" is to be made, as Gilmour (1989: 8) suggests "accountable to the community", and if as Geertz argues its value lies in a "reflexive immersion" (cited by Wexler, 1983: 13) which yields insights beyond members' immediate discourse, how can this be achieved without some measure of prior detachment? The moment a political organisation asks questions about the manner in which it is or has functioned, the moment it looks back upon the work with which it is or has been involved; is it not from that moment and in that instance engaged in the process of evaluation and distancing itself from the immediacy and demands of the present?

## 2.3 WHY ETHNOGRAPHY? WHY PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION?

Trow (in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 332) writes that "different kinds of information about man and society are gathered most fully and economically in different ways ... the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation". While this study is based upon interviews and not upon any extensive "observation", the general approach and techniques used in ethnography and participant observation are particularly relevant. Central to participant observation is the idea that the researcher is at one and the same time participant in the social world and observer/analyst (Spradley, 1980: 56-7). In this his "prejudiced" thought interacts with the experience and

reality of social life.

In this respect West (1983) has drawn interesting parallels with marxism. He starts off by rejecting on epistemological grounds any incompatibility between marxism and ethnography (Ibid: 257) and, while pointing out differences between traditional (Chicago-school) participant observation and marxism, sets out to emphasize the epistemological and ontological ground both share and have in common. A "defensible neo-marxist ethnography" (Ibid: 266) is thus possible. The gist of West's argument is that both participant observation and marxism are as much concerned with form as with content in social analysis. Both see concepts as stemming from, and produced by, the real world (see also Mandel, 1976; 1978). He therefore speaks about a dialectic between "lived experience and conceptualisation of it" (1983: 267). A case is thus made for engaging and interacting with the social world. And so arises the need for fieldwork and the importance of studying the everyday activities and worldview of respondents.

> ... qualitative methodology advocates an approach to examining the empirical world which requires the researcher to interpret the real world from the perspective of the subjects of his investigations (Filstead, 1970: 7; see also Becker, 1970: 25; Spradley, 1980: ch 1).

The above extract can be said to represent the ethnographic

approach; the extracts below can be said to represent the views of Marx:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life ... (Marx & Engels, cited by West, 1983: 268).

And:

> The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live ... (Marx, Ibid: 1983: 272).

Hence, the by now familiar problem of the interplay between the material/experience/practice on the one hand, and the conceptual and thought on the other, was investigated using techniques associated with participant observation and ethnography because, epistemologically, this method assumes that knowledge about society is best gained by engagement, on the ground, with the everyday activities and mental discourse of real individuals. As Rock says with reference to the philosophical starting point of ethnography, "Valid knowledge is held to reside neither in the subject nor the object, but in the transactions which unfold between them" (cited in West, 1983: 264; see also Mandel, 1976: 17-25; Mandel, 1978; Schwartz & Schwartz in McCall & Simmons,

1969: 94 and Hammersley, 1979a: 122, 126).

These issues are not just of theoretical interest regarding the relationship between "phenomenon" and "form". There are political implications which many ignore; below Marx conceptualizes Communist theory not as an idealist construct but as the product of what is thrown up, on the ground, by capitalist society:

> The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based upon ideas and principles that have been discovered, by this or that would be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, the actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes (Marx, cited in Tucker, 1972: 218).

The whole point about "reality" or the "concrete" being the beginning and the end of social analysis is, for Marx, inseparable from the POLITICAL idea of changing the here and now. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently," runs the famous thesis on Feuerbach, "the point however is to change it". This amounts to a vital difference between traditional ethnography and recent neo-marxist ethnography in education. It raises the issue of bias discussed earlier once more. The idea of "objectivity" in mainstream ethnography is I believe closely associated with notions of detachment not only from everyday social life from the perspective of academic analysis, but from the struggles of our times as well. One

sometimes looks at some of the topics social scientists are concerned about and wonders of what relevance they could possibly be, so far removed are they from the contentious issues of contemporary society. A far cry indeed from Donne's injunction that we are all ultimately "involved in mankind" so that we need never need to inquire "for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee".

The separation of the social scientist from his/her milieu is akin to the separation of the individual from society; it can probably be traced back to the world the European bourgeoisie made during its heyday in the nineteenth century when its best expression was possibly Freudian psychology and psychoanalyses. Ethnographers and anthropologists are well-known for removing themselves from their society and "going native" in far-off, "exotic" locations. This has, of course, not always been the case; if anything the trend in recent times appears to be to focus upon the familiar problems and institutions of one's own culture. Yet, one must surely question much of the work that has been and still is being produced. Thus Pelto and Pelto (1978: 230) write, "It has frequently been difficult for anthropologists to demonstrate that obtaining a new kinship terminology from still another culture adds significantly to the problem-solving capacity of the discipline ..." The methodology becomes ever more sophisticated, quantitative, neo-positivist and an end in itself (see, for example, Bernard, 1988). The researcher

and a team of assistants painstakingly (and quantitatively) count the number of huts, people at the wedding, market or fair and then checks (qualitatively) whether, indeed, this is typical or not. How many males? Females? What are their ages? And so masses of (verifiable) data which may take years to process is collected. Whatever world-view the investigator holds is not at issue and barely affects the work done - so great is the "detachment", physically and otherwise, that bias is not a problem at all. In theory everything can be socially relevant; nothing is entirely and completely pointless. Spradley (1980: 105-7) discusses the ways in which one can select a topic for ethnographic study. Social domains are often based upon "sequence relationships". For instance, one could organize observing shoppers in a supermarket as follows:

> Stage 1: entering the store
> Stage 2: selecting a shopping cart
> Stage 3: choosing a direction or route
> Stage 4: picking out meat
> ...
> Stage 10: leaving the store (Ibid: 107).

Further on he asks, "Are there different stages of entering the store?" "Are there different stages in selecting a shopping cart?" (Ibid: 118). Ethnography for ethnography's sake.

The pursuit of detachment and objectivity often goes hand in hand with an implicitly held desire to shun anything

"emotional". An example from the boycott literature is the passionless manner in which these revolts are often described and analysed. That in itself is not neutral or "value-free". The intentional or unintentional assumption appears to be that rational, discursive evaluation must be given primacy and not be "clouded" by subjective emotion. There is little justification for this in real life; it is particularly out of place given the nature of the actual events I shall presently describe. How can one in a "neutral", "tranquil" way relate the Trojan Horse incident or what they did to June Esau in detention (see Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 55-60)? It is, of course, precisely the relationship (in the mainly political sense and not in, say a psychological or physiological sense) between what is rational and what has to do with the senses which constitutes the topic of this investigation. Quite clearly, militancy, learning and the changing psychological atmosphere prevalent at any one point during the uprising were all interwoven. (See Appendix C.) What is at issue in other words is the recognition - and not denial - of the psychology of politicization and conscientization during times of social tumult.

On the one hand I have rejected the kind of ivory tower detachment advocated by Elias (1956) which is very similar to the approach which underpins much ethnographic work; on the other hand I have warned of the dangers inherent in Wexler's views. The answer lies in a recognition of the

ever-present tension between involvement and detachment, between scientific analysis and propaganda and the pitfalls of an approach which veers too strongly in any one direction. It should once more be pointed out that "participation" (practice) and "observation" (theory) should not be separated; in ethnography (as in real life) they interact and it is very often difficult to state where the former ends and the latter starts. In many ways to conceptualize such a dichotomy is arbitrary because it is done in the abstract. This may be useful in helping to clarify and understand the problems involved. Nevertheless, in everyday life, for most of us, what we do and what we think do cannot neatly be compartmentalized. Reality is more often than not very messy.

One or two points which provide a historical perspective to the whole discussion are relevant. No doubt there are times and social settings when it is easy to be "objective". The South Africa of the 1980s was not a place for this kind of thing. To have pondered over some of the concerns of this thesis then would have seemed singularly inappropriate. Political organisations and the activists who work in them cannot, sometimes, afford the luxury of "analysis" which, moreover, is informed by a measure of "detachment". There may be times when the political situation is conducive to this; there may be times when it is not. Then the immediate situation forces all to think and act in a positivist manner, to, for better or worse,

make definite decisions and act upon them as best they can. Bias and the problems associated with it are, like almost everything else, socially related and determined.

Apart from what has already been mentioned, there are at least two other reasons, of no less importance, why the ethnographic approach is useful:

a) Firstly, there is the emphasis on discovering the nature of the world-view of respondents as opposed to those of the social analyst. Obviously the two are not mutually exclusive in any absolute way. For instance, when questionnaires are used we learn about the thinking of those who formulated the questions as well as the material they gathered in this manner. However, this whole point of departure does go a long way to producing a more "balanced" and "unbiased" perspective and, therefore, more "objective" analysis and results. (Indeed, had I not started out with these ideas uppermost in my mind, I may not have been led to alter my own, a priori, expectations and presuppositions in respect of the findings I expected to discover, and those the empirical data forced me to make. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the empirical evidence was surprising in at least two important ways.)

b) Secondly, also crucial to ethnography is the description of method. In the same way that I critically reviewed the existing literature on student boycotts so, I

hope, the reader will review what follows. Progress (or movement, at least) in knowledge, in society, in a political organisation often results because of the clash of conflicting ideas/classes/interests, etc. In this respect criticism, argument and disagreement can be tremendously constructive. It is not enough to simply state this in a kind of platitudinous manner. One way to help the process along is to explicitly state what informed the investigation (Chapters 1 to 3), how it was done and what occurred in the field (Appendices A and B). The latter considerations, of course, always feature prominently in ethnographies which was one of the main reasons - and I cannot emphasize this strongly enough - I was attracted to this methodology. In this way others can more critically judge the work, or can attempt similar research using better methods in order to compare, challenge and contest my findings (see Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 34-40), to say nothing of the theories and methods used. We sometimes need to remind ourselves of the obvious: that in order to better understand the social world we must (at least try) build upon and/or break down what has already been achieved. That is, above all, a COLLECTIVE endeavour in which social science as a whole, as distinct from individual practitioners, must benefit; its proven tool is criticism.

The main data for the research was collected by means of personalised interviews with the 1985 SRC members who

attended the school at which I teach. In Appendix A and B, I outline the more technical aspects of the methodology and give a full account of the research process so that it can be seen how the rather general arguments put forward so far were applied in practice.

## 2.4 THE PLAN AND PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS

Mandel (1978: 14) writes that " ... for Marx, the concrete was both the 'real starting point' and the final goal of knowledge ... " It is by ACTING upon nature, i.e. by work that humanity's essence, or the essence of whole historical epochs, or modes of production is defined. The first few lines of Capital state, "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities' ... Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity" (1976c: 125). However, Marx made a distinction between the manner in which data is collected and how it is presented in written form (see Mandel, 1976: 17-25; Mandel, 1978, especially 13-22 and Nicolaus, 1973: 60-1):

> Of course the method of presentation must differ from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done successfully can the real movement be appropriately presented. If this work is done successfully, if the inner life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have

> before us is an a priori construction (Marx, 1976: 102).

Thus the manner in which "the commodity" is analysed in Chapter 1 of Capital proceeds at the level of an analysis of its "inner life" in relation to the capitalist mode of production as a whole. (The essential nature of commodities is uncovered and analysed as follows: all commodities, the product of labour, have some kind of practical use, but they can also be exchanged: shoes can be worn or sold at a price; they have a dual value.) The approach is at once both materialist and dialectical. The commodity is an all-pervasive, concrete characteristic of capitalist society but it is also an analytical category which helps us make sense of the nature of capitalism. The unity of contradictory opposites derived from an analysis of its essence, viz. use value and exchange value, is explained. This is important in the light of the entire analysis which follows:

> Can one conceive of this identity [use value vs. exchange value] breaking down? Are grounds given on which the mediating movement (money, exchange) may fail to take place? Certainly. The entire work [i.e. Capital] is addressed precisely to the historic, economic, political etc. conditions on which this initial identity depends; more: the main purpose of the work is to demonstrate that the contradictions within this identity necessarily lead to the suspension of the same conditions and hence to the break-up of commodity production, and to the rise of a system founded on use

values (Nicolaus, 1973: 41; see also 60-1).

West has implicitly focussed on the problem of presentation by the issues he raises in criticizing Willis' Learning to Labour. He argues that whereas the two should have been integrated, a dichotomy exists between the marxist analysis on the one hand and the descriptive ethnographic data on the other (1983: 260-1). He asks, "Just HOW do the descriptions relate to the major analytic categories ... " (Ibid: 261, his emphasis) and then goes on to demonstrate that the differences notwithstanding, both marxism and traditional Chicago-school participant observation share a common concern with integrating form and content:

> the central tradition of sociological ethnography has not been concerned simply with description of phenomenal social life, but rather has consistently involved analysis through some fairly widely accepted, rigorous and demanding procedures ... such epistemological procedures only make sense if accompanied by an ontology which includes the notion of form as a major organising component without which sociation would not be possible (Ibid: 266).

For both marxism and interactionism concepts and social categories used in analysis arise from, and are generated by, the lived reality of social life:

> (Categories) arise ... from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the phenomenal forms of essential

relations (Marx, cited Ibid: 269).

Hence Carver (1975: 45) ends his editor's preface to Marx's Introduction to the Grundrisse by saying:

> ... [Marx's] work is at least a reminder that an economic study need not be restricted to `facts and figures' but can begin (and perhaps ought to begin, if it is to be effective) with a close examination of basic concepts and presuppositions (see also 42-3).

As was noted in the previous chapter, much (though not all) of the boycott literature consists of chronological accounts of the events and the facts of struggle often told in journalistic fashion. Where sometimes problems are formulated one is often left with the impression that what the writer really wants to do is to recount the dramatic happenings which took place. There is, of course, no end to these; as Molteno (1979a: 55) says for the practical purposes of writing the facts of 1976 or 1980 or 1985 are infinite. One does not, of course, wish to deny the usefulness of such work; indeed it is the sine qua non of interpretation. It is also part of the historical experience of the oppressed in South Africa; an experience which must be recorded. Yet it is the meaning one gives to the events which is of greater significance.

Significant in the sense that it is by means of such

meanings/symbols/categories that we are able to understand the social world; significant too in the more political sense that each generation re-interprets its past in the light of its present social conditions. I suspect that there is at present a greater willingness to review students boycotts critically in the light of the (largely) post 1986 chaos in very many schools. That chaos has continued despite calls from the top to "return to classes"; despite the fact that negotiations have replaced mass struggle as the current buzzword (except when the former runs into difficulties or the latter can be used not to defeat the enemy but as a means of political pressure in pursuit of the former). A report in the Weekly Mail (31/1/92-6/2/92) by Ray Nxumalo states:

> I arrived at Soshanguve's Tiyelani High School at about 9.30 am on Tuesday ... The school was re-opened on Monday after being closed [by the DET] for a week ... [because of] the pupils' demand for a 'pass one, pass all' policy and the admission of pupils by other pupils.
>
> There was no teaching taking place. Those pupils in classrooms were playing draughts and just whiling time away ...
>
> Others indulged in a game of dice-throwing ... three empty quarts of beer were half-hidden under the chairs ... some pupils had been drinking - and more was to follow as the day wore on.

Criticism of the anarchic and militaristic features of student boycotts has found expression in the boycott literature where at least four writers (Jordi, 1987; Wolpe,

1988, Nekhwevha, 1992, and Johnson in Johnson, 1988) have seen the movement from the adoption of the slogan "People's Education for People's Power" at the NECC conference in December 1985 in place of the slogan "Education Now, Liberation Later" as progressive. (See also the keynote address by Zwelakhe Sisulu at the NECC conference in March 1986 in Lodge & Nasson et al, 1991: 336-343).

Ray Nxumalo's report derives its meaning in the light of the administrative breakdown at many schools in the wake of more than a decade of student protest, in the wake of very poor examination results and in the wake of attempts to get schools back to normal. Uprisings of the kind which occurred in 1985-6 are almost by definition accompanied by widespread anarchy. We should not be surprised if such anarchy is NOW viewed in the light of its SUBSEQUENT effects. Likewise, we should not be surprised that the meaning socialists attached to the October revolution in Russia when it occurred will differ considerably from the meaning they attach to that event today. One could with justification argue that any such discussion cannot ignore an analysis of the recent collapse of stalinism in Eastern Europe.

The argument is that social phenomena can be grasped and the study of society made possible by generating analytical categories or symbols which are themselves produced by reality (and not abstractly). If "lessons" are to be

"learnt" from history, then meanings must be given to the facts and events of the past. By themselves they represent very little. It is thus no accident that different generations look at the same historical periods, the same "facts", differently for they are grappling with different problems. (One thinks especially of the vast literature on the French Revolution by succeeding generations of French historians.)

I have tried to apply these ideas as follows: Chapter 3 interprets the events of the boycott. From this interpretation symbols for analysis of ex-student consciousness are formulated. The rest of the thesis analyses the empirical material in terms of analytical categories derived from the symbols. This was done after both the events of the boycott as well as the data collected from the interviews had been summarized comment-free. Needless to say this refers mainly to the presentation, was the general approach and procedure used in writing and was the way in which the final product was produced; in practice there were times and instances when these "steps" overlapped so that there was considerable traffic between them (see Carr, 1964: 28-9).

## 2.5 SUMMARY

It may be useful at this point to try to knit together the various strands of thought that have been developed:

a) This research explores the effects of participation in political action five years ago on the present political consciousness of former SRC members. It seeks to critically evaluate the specificity of the CURRENT thinking of respondents in relation to the struggles of 1985-6 and asks what its contemporary relevance is.

b) Methodologies commonly used in ethnography were employed mainly because they, too, are based upon notions concerning the "ideal" springing from the "real"; from the reciprocal interaction of the social analyst and the subject of his/her analysis (both during interviewing and when making sense of the interview data);

c) It follows that the general form in which the empirical material is presented as well as the actual steps followed in processing it must also be construed as a dialectical inter-relationship between (and integration of), fact and interpretation.

The interplay between theory and practice is thus explored in terms of:

a) what was investigated;

b) how this was done;

c) the procedures followed in analysing the data and in

presenting it in written form.

It may legitimately be argued that up until now the problem formulated for investigation has itself been constructed in an idealist, subjective manner: from a particular application of Marx's historical materialism and from an interpretive, critical review of the existing boycott literature. Does this therefore not mean that I have arbitrarily imposed upon the facts of recent history issues which I think are important? What justification is there in reality for studying these things? In a polemic with Wagner, Marx writes about the method and presentation he uses in Chapter 1 of Capital, vol 1 as follows:

> I do not start from 'concepts', hence I do not have to 'divide' [or 'introduce'] these in any way. What I start from is the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society and that is the 'COMMODITY'. I analyse it right from the beginning in the FORM IN WHICH IT APPEARS (Notes on Adolph Wagner, in Carver, 1975: 198; emphasis in the original).

In the next chapter I argue that theory and practice were also an integral part of the events which occurred during the boycott. In this way I try to justify the study of the topic and, as was mentioned above, set up the categories in terms of which ex-student consciousness are analysed in Chapters 5 and 6. The intention, therefore, has been to link the chapters theoretically.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE 1985-6 WESTERN CAPE SCHOOLS' BOYCOTTS

> We bold enough to question
> We brave enough to fight
> We strong enough to challenge you
> for what we know is right
> We are the young and the strong
> And we are the writing on the wall (cited by Johnson in Johnson, 1988: 143).

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a general background narrative of what occurred during the boycotts and, more especially, a framework for interpreting the political consciousness of former students.[1] The focus is almost exclusively on the so-called "Coloured" institutions under the control of the Department of Education and Culture (in the House of Representatives) (DEC)[2] and on the Western Cape. In order to provide some kind of national perspective it will be enough to recall that by the time the school boycott in the Western Cape started, that is towards the end of July 1985, the Eastern Cape and the Vaal triangle had been in the throes of open revolt for almost a year and in certain Eastern Cape towns schools had been closed for more than two years (see SAAIR, 1986: 4; Indicator SA, 1985: 6-9; Hall, 1986: 9-12; Lodge in Lodge & Nasson et al, 1991: 65-78; Laurence, 1985; Howe, 1985; Seekings in Frankel et al, 1988).

From the time the boycott started it was characterised by the interplay of the two features discussed in Chapter 1 which defined its specificity: as students acted, organised rallies, marches and engaged the regime's police and army in street battles, they were confronted with ideas and problems which the general situation demanded they solve. These two aspects of the revolt took on different forms at different times; they were more often than not inseparable. The argument that I shall try to develop in this chapter is that this was one of the most important dynamics which fuelled the rebellion and which unfolded during its course.

## 3.2 THE BEGINNING: AUGUST

### 3.2.1 THE WESTERN CAPE BOYCOTTS START

When the government in late July 1985 introduced its state of emergency in thirty-six magisterial districts and detained 113 activists under the new regulations (Bennett, 1986: 11), it had probably hoped to quell the nationwide uprising. Instead, this was one of the main sparks which ignited protests in the hitherto quiet Western Cape. The other issue which caused the conflagration to spread to this area was the assassination of four Cradock anti-apartheid leaders - Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sicelo Mhlawuli and Sparrow Mkhonto - early in July (SAAIR, 1986: 4). In the week prior to these leaders' funeral

pupils boycotted classes in Zwelethemba (Worcester). On 19 July, the day before the burial, about 15 000 pupils joined other mourners at a memorial service in Guguletu. Police used teargas, whips and shotgun fire to disperse the crowd (Hall, 1986: 12). Violence flared and eleven were injured (Pratt, 1988: 104). It was at about this time that a boycott in the African townships in the Western Cape began. University of the Western Cape (UWC) students soon joined (UDF leader in Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 8-9; Interviewee 8).

Pupils at twenty-nine secondary schools joined UWC and Guguletu students in their boycott of classes; instead "Awareness Programmes" (APs) were held. Apart from the emergency and the killing of the Cradock four, they also protested against the transfer of a Scotsdene teacher who was active in the Kraaifontein Civic Association. The Western Cape Student Action Committee (WECSAC), representing forty-five schools and colleges in the Peninsula, was formed. The organisation called for a two day boycott; it demanded that the emergency regulations be scrapped; that the transferred teacher be reinstated in her old post; the right to elect SRCs and the withdrawal of security forces from the townships (Hall, 1986: 12). The "two day boycott" lasted until the end of July. On 5 August WECSAC suspended the boycott. However, the next day 3 000 students were present at a rally at UCT where UCT students decided to boycott lectures for the rest of the

week. Mass rallies were also held at Spine Road SS (Mitchells Plain) and again later in the week at UCT (Ibid: 13).

On 12 August WECSAC called off the boycott because of "weakness of organisation in the Western Cape generally". However, the next day mass rallies were held at Modderdam and Woodlands high schools; altogether 9 000 attended. At UWC a staff member's office was attacked because he was, allegedly, a police informer. On 15 August UWC students decided to resume their boycott for the rest of the week. The university was closed for a short period (Ibid). Joint rallies were also held at Trafalgar in central Cape Town and in Wynberg. On 22 August the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO) and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) organised a joint mass rally at the Samaj Centre in Rylands (SAAIR, 1986: 5).

If the students were initially somewhat hesitant and confused about whether or not they should embark upon a sustained boycott of classes (Pratt, 1988: 105; Jordi, 1987: 58; Nekhwevha, 1992: 8-9), the matter was decided for them by the response of the police. From the start the police used force to break up mass meetings, rallies and marches thus fuelling militancy and providing new grievances. A charged climate was created in which protest and kamikaze action could thrive - and spread.

On 30 July UWC students and police clashed; burning barricades soon blocked the nearby Modderdam Road. Two days later teargas was fired at students and cars passing the campus were stoned. On 7 August students protesting inside the grounds of Silverstream high school in Manenberg were whipped. The next day pupils at Mondale high school (Mitchells Plain) were teargassed and beaten. A march planned by UWC students was forcibly broken up. On 28 and 29 July large protesting crowds were dispersed in Nyanga and Guguletu (Hall, 1986: 13; see also Nekhwevha, 1992: 11 ff). Both areas, including Crossroads, were sealed off. Violent protest had now engulfed all the metropolitan areas in the country (Hall, 1986: 13).

At a number of schools police simply stormed the buildings and attacked whomever or whatever they found (LCHR, 1986: 61-3). At one Cape Town school on 29 August there had been no protests at all on that particular day. About twenty children were leaving the premises when three plainclothes policemen fired rubber bullets at them. Other children then came to see what what was happening. The principal later reported:

> Within fifteen minutes, virtually the whole police force, or so it appeared, had cordoned off the school grounds, and viciously bombarded us with teargas and rubber bullets.
>
> When the police realised they had us trapped like animals inside the buildings, they moved onto the grounds, smashed our

> windows,threw teargas bombs inside classrooms ... Conditions ... were like the gas chambers of Auschwitz (cited in LCHR, 1986: 62).

To the above catalogue of boycott incidents must be added the following development. Between 1980 and 1985 eighty-five "voluntary associations" were formed in the Western Cape as compared with seventy-two for the whole of the 1970s. In 1985 alone fifty-one extra-parliamentary, anti-apartheid organisations were formed, excluding PTSAs and Student Action Committees (SACs) (Matiwana & Walters, 1986: 114). These organisations now found their public, protest meetings bursting at the seams with excited, vocal participants and those who simply wanted to know what was going on. "Participation in mass meetings was an experience in itself. Community halls were crammed" (ROAPE, 1985: 107). On 8 August the Call of Islam held a well-attended rally in Hanover Park. On 20 August about 5 500 people attended rallies called by the United Democratic Front (UDF) in Mitchells Plain and Lotus River. On 21 August a rally organised by the NUM drew a crowd of 4 500 (Hall, 1986: 13-4).

A mass meeting of teachers initiated by "progressive lecturers at UWC" took place on 15 August (ROAPE, 1985: 105). Teachers felt "helpless" and "threatened" and were "at a loss, not knowing what to do" (Interviewee 2). It

was decided that teachers would "down tools" for two days. At most schools this was meaningless because there were in any case no formal classes. However, at some schools principals had instructed their staff to see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil and, with their heads buried in the sand, go about their business as though everything was normal. At a few schools lessons were continuing, albeit sporadically (Interviewee 3).

At a subsequent teachers' meeting on 20 August it was resolved to form a teachers' trade union. All agreed that the existing Cape Professional Teachers' Association (CPTA) was too conservative. Some weeks later the Western Cape Teachers' Union (WECTU) was launched (Jordi, 1987: 114).

The events thus described launched the protests and, together with the organisational structures set up by students laid the bases for further developments.

### 3.2.2 STUDENT ORGANISATION

There were three levels of student organisation in the Western Cape during the boycott:

a) regional bodies like the Inter-Schools Coordinating Committee (ISCC), the Western Cape Students' Action Committee (WECSAC), the Western Cape Students' Council (WECSCO);

b) local student bodies or Action Committees and

c) school-based SRCs.

I shall briefly look at each in turn.

### 3.2.2.1 REGIONAL BODIES

At the start of the boycott, the existing regional body, the ISCC, coordinated activities. It was formed in mid-1984 during the anti-election campaign in opposition to the tricameral parliament and was ideologically linked to the Students of Young Azania (SOYA) which, in turn, had close ties with the National Forum (NF) and the Black Consciousness Movement. It represented between twenty-five and forty schools (Ibid: 59-60). The ISCC was eclipsed by WECSAC during the first week or two of the boycott and then became a SOYA grouping within WECSAC. WECSAC was initiated by UWC students because they wanted to include tertiary students and because they wanted to establish a UDF-dominated student body. At its formation it represented forty educational institutions; the number soon grew to eighty. However, by September it had declined to six (Ibid: 60).

WECSAC was plagued by a number of problems. Each affiliated institution could have one delegate. This made decision-making and effective organisation difficult.

Mandates had to be collected and delegates had to be contacted from at least eighty different institutions spread over the whole of the Western Cape. In addition, because of the presence of different political tendencies, power struggles and caucuses developed. Students from tertiary institutions tended to dominate and so alienate the rest. Moreover, police harassment and repression as well as the sometimes hostile attitude of school principals did not make matters any easier. Students complained about "internal haggling", "bureaucratic manoeuvering", an "absence of democracy", all leading to a "lack of direction" (Ibid: 61).

Differences were particularly evident between those who stood for "Education for Liberation" which implied that the boycott was a temporary strategy used during times of crisis and that formal education had to continue during normal times slotting into the general struggle for democracy; and those who stood for "Liberation before Education" which implied rejecting all formal education and creating conditions of anarchy and "ungovernability" in schools until freedom was attained.

The Joint SRCs in the African townships had informal contact with WECSAC, but avoided formal affiliation because WECSAC was not aligned to COSAS and because of "historical misgivings about coordinating their struggle as a minority with coloured students" (Ibid: 62; see also Nekhwevha,

1992: 8 ff). Schools in Manenberg, Bonteheuvel and Mitchells Plain, which were strongly supportive of COSAS and the UDF and schools in the Athlone area, began to withdraw from WECSAC in late August and began to throw in their weight behind their area-based action committees (see 3.2.2.2 below). At this point WECSAC became a largely pro-SOYA organisation. Nevertheless, albeit largely for public consumption, formal allegiance to WECSAC continued as it was popularly seen as a symbol of student unity (Jordi, 1987: 62-3).

As WECSAC declined, other groups emerged. By late September the SACs (see 3.2.2.2 below) had become more important and in early October the IRF was established. In addition, and more or less at the same time, WECSCO was formed as well. This was a period of considerable confusion in student organisation (Ibid: 63-4).

The IRF did not last long and such support as it did manage to muster was varied and inconsistent. It was comprised of delegates from the SACs (see 3.2.2.2 below). Tertiary students were not represented but it did, on some occasions, enjoy the affiliation of the Joint SRCs. " ... the IRF suffered the same problems of political/ideological/strategic division that had weakened WECSAC and collapsed within two months of its formation" (Ibid: 64). As will be related, division came to the fore particularly when different demands were made regarding the

final exams. The effects of the state of emergency and the launch of WECSCO added to the confusion. WECSCO was established in early October by student leaders who supported the UDF. It excluded ASAC which (at least in the Athlone area) could be regarded as the most influential, direction-giving SAC, the Joint SRCs in the African townships and the SOYA grouping within WECSAC (Ibid: 64-5).

### 3.2.2.2 STUDENT ACTION COMMITTEES

The SACs were local, area-based student bodies. Schools which were near to one another sent delegates to these forums to coordinate and organise the protests in their areas. They included ASAC (Athlone), MIPSAC (Mitchells Plain), HASAC (Hanover Park), BISCO (Bonteheuvel), ELSAC (Elsies River), HEISAC (Heideveld), BELSAC (Bellville), RETSAC (Retreat) and LOGSAC (Lotus River and Grassy Park). In the African townships there was the Joint SRCs which had a similar structure and was similarly constituted (Ibid: 66).

> Just as the political affiliation of different SACs varied depending on the kind of influences different schools and leadership groupings were exposed to, so the organisational strength, the depth of representation and the practical effectiveness of the SACs was very uneven. These features were determined by the experience and leadership ability of affiliated SRCs, by the extent to which they had the active support of pupils in the schools, and by the degree and nature of support that was rendered by teacher and

community organisations in the different areas (Ibid: 68).

### 3.2.2.3 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS

Some schools had SRCs before the boycott started while others did not. In some cases where there were no SRCs or where they were not militant and/or ineffective, they were replaced by self-appointed action committees (Ibid: 66).

A whole host of factors made the practice of democracy problematical, complex and far from easy. It is possible and conceivable that at the same institution students would on one occasion simply be bulldozed into supporting a particular form of action by, for example, being told that some or other regional or political organisation had decided there would be a stayaway the following day; whereas a day or two later mandates and discussions would painstakingly be organised in regard to another important matter. Political and ideological differences (or their absence) at regional student level, within people's organisations in the community and amongst teachers all came into play at various times, as circumstances changed and depending on particular conditions and traditions prevailing at particular schools. Generally speaking, 1985 confirmed the trend that was taking place in the Western Cape over the preceding few years, viz. that the UDF

enjoyed mass support both in terms of the numbers that had joined its structures and in terms of the numbers that, while they may not formally have joined, supported its campaigns. This did not mean that other organisations had lost all influence. The Cape Action League (CAL) and the NUM (who in some ways agreed with one another, but in others disagreed) sometimes had little or no influence while at other times they wielded influence out of proportion to the numbers who actually supported them, especially through the Western Province Council on Sport (WPCOS), certain members in WECTU, their civics and some teachers.

Then, too, there was the state's security legislation and the actions of its security forces. How does one get to one's constituency during an Emergency when half of the students are not at school either through apathy, or because their parents force them to stay at home, or because they are afraid, or because it is not possible to (physically) get to school? Most of the leaders were probably in detention or on the run anyway. Furthermore, there is much truth in Jordi's remark (1987: 72) that, "Although harsh criticism was often directed at pupil leadership for being undemocratic and unrepresentative, such sentiments are usually inseparable from disagreements with the decisions taken by students".

Yet there was an underlying, historically unprecedented

unity which made so much possible. Very often, especially in the face of police action, the heated differences which threatened to tear particular structures or institutions apart during yesterday's marathon meeting became - and appeared to all to be - irrelevant as news came of the latest police atrocities. Moreover, this unity was cemented by a common belief which cut across class lines, despite political and ideological differences and was held by even some of the most conservative, that basically Apartheid was wrong, intolerable even, and that it must be replaced by something better.

### 3.2.3 THE CONSUMER BOYCOTT

The student boycott of classes overlapped with the consumer boycott of white businesses which began in various small Cape towns and centred on local grievances and struggles. In mid-July it took off in Port Elizabeth and in the course of the next month spread to the rest of the Eastern Cape where most success was achieved, and then to the Western Cape, the Transvaal and Natal (see Mufson, 1990: 106-8; White, 1986: 89-96; Lodge in Lodge & Nasson et al, 1991: 79-83). In all these areas attempts were made to gain the support of the progressive trade unions. Most of the unions raised objections to the manner in which this was done, but all of them supported the campaign. While the initial target was white businesses, this was broadened to include the shops of blacks who collaborated with the

government (Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 9; see also Indicator SA, 1986: 8-9).

From the start there were different views about what the consumer boycott was all about and what it could hope to achieve. Mkhuseli Jack, leader of the Port Elizabeth Consumer Boycott Committee, claimed that, "Our buying power power is going to be the thing that is going to decide the future of our country" (cited in Seekings, 1986: 20). A Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) organiser stated that "The boycott ... feed(s) on an anti-white sentiment in the townships. People see whites as the problem". A UDF spokesperson in Johannesburg said, "The boycott aims to make them (i.e. whites) aware of what is going on in the black townships so that they can begin to demand change ..." The Port Elizabeth general secretary of the UDF criticised the boycott: "This is definitely not a revolutionary moment. The central problem at the moment is the lack of structured working class leadership and organisations to determine the pace and nature of our struggle. Political and community organisations dictate the struggle at the moment" (cited in Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 10). Most UDF organisers did not agree with this view. For example, a member of the East London Consumer Boycott Committee had this to say:

> The [consumer] boycott brings together workers, students, church people, businessmen and rural communities into practical

> action against government and its policies. For the purposes of immediate mobilisation this form of unity is crucial and we are committed to maintain it. This class alliance, together with other forms of democratic struggle, must inevitably shake the government (cited Ibid).

It appears that some perceived the consumer boycott to be a means whereby pressure could be exerted on businessmen to become more vocal and active in demanding change (see Indicator SA, 1986: 8-9), while others saw it as merely another form of resistance and had reservations about its ideological and practical efficacy.

In late July an anonymous pamphlet was distributed in the black townships in the Western Cape calling on people to buy in their own areas only (Jordi, 1987: 89). At the end of July 4 000 UWC students stated their intention to implement a consumer boycott with the help of anti-apartheid organisations (Pratt, 1988: 135). The Western Cape Consumer Action Committee (WCCAC) was subsequently formed; it included progressive trade unions, CAL, WPCOS, Thornhill Civic, Western Cape Youth League, Retail and Allied Workers' Union (RAWU), Clothing Workers' Union (CLOWU), Call of Islam, Western Province Council of Churches, NUM, AL Jihaad, Plastic and Allied Workers Union, Sarepta Youth and Workers Organisation, District Six Interim Youth Movement, AME Ministers Alliance, Federation of Cape Civic Associations and WECSAC. The boycott of

white shops was launched on 14 August. Within three weeks eight local committees were formed in Bellville, Athlone, Woodstock, BoKaap, Elsies River, Ravensmead, Wynberg and Mitchells Plain to monitor the boycott (Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 18).

This was the first time Cape Town's warring political organisations united since the days when acrimonious and heated debate in the Disorderly Bills' Action Committee (DBAC) split opposition over the formation of the UDF in 1983. As the WCCAC began its deliberations some must have wondered just how long its newly-found unity would last. Their fears soon seemed justified when trade unions not affiliated to the UDF, the NUM and organisations affiliated to it, objected to a blanket call of a boycott of white-owned shops. They argued that the call was racist and impractical to implement because many workers could not buy at black shops (presumably because their goods were more expensive). If people could not support the boycott, unity would be broken. They therefore supported a selective boycott of the big chain stores. The UDF-linked organisations called for a general boycott because this had been the case nationally and because it would create confusion if this call was changed. On 9 September a majority vote in favour of a selective boycott was carried. The UDF expressed reservations. When the committee met again on 6 October the UDF had intended to once more propose a broad boycott, however most unionists

were absent and the NUM reiterated its call for a selective boycott. A considerable degree of confusion resulted (Ibid). What was happening at grassroots level?

At a mass meeting in Wynberg in mid-August Allan Boesak (UDF patron and pastor at UWC) stated that white business was "keeping the machinery of apartheid going". A consumer boycott would help to get rid of Apartheid. At a similar meeting in Worcester he accused white business of supporting the state and stated that the boycott was a non-violent means of protest which had to be supported. A few days after the Worcester meeting, a rally in Rocklands (Mitchells Plain), attended by 4 000 people, adopted a resolution which expressed support for the student protest, the consumer boycott and demanded an end to the Emergency, the withdrawal of troops in the townships and the release of Mandela and other detainees (Pratt, 1988: 131-2). These demands were similar to those of the WCCAC which also included: a living wage for workers, lower prices for basic foodstuffs and a united, democratic South Africa. At the time it appeared that the organisers would call off the campaign if short-term demands were met or if it could no longer be sustained (Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 19).

There were "frequent summonses to high school pupils to take up the cudgels". On 7 August police came across 200 Bonteheuvel High pupils on their way to the local Civic Centre where they were going to discuss "consumer boycotts

of white businesses". Sjamboks were used to hit and chase the pupils; five were arrested and charged with attending an illegal gathering. Some days later a meeting of pupils from seven schools in the Mitchells Plain area met at Woodlands SS to rally support for the boycott of shops. In Worcester it was reported that pupils were making door-to-door house visits to persuade the community to support the boycott when they were dispersed by police using rubber bullets and teargas. Door-to-door canvassing and the distribution of pamphlets were embarked upon by students in Cape Town as well (Pratt, 1988: 134-5; Interviewee 3).

A teacher in Bellville South who was "very much in favour of [the consumer] boycott" stated that pupils questioned him carefully about it. Because many of their parents worked at white-owned shops, they were afraid that they would lose their jobs (Interviewee 4). In some areas like Bishop Lavis, most people shopped locally in any case so that the consumer boycott was not really relevant (Interviewee 1).

On 20 August, the second anniversary of the establishment of the UDF, four mass meetings were held in different areas: Lotus River, Mitchells Plain, Bellville and Athlone. At all these meetings the consumer boycott was advertised. A total of 10 000 people attended (Jordi, 1987: 89).

The "success [of the consumer boycott] either in terms of impact on business or as a way of building organisation is doubtful" (Ibid: 90). One unionist stated at the time:

> There is no systematic monitoring of the situation so we have no clear idea of the degree of support. Monitoring is sporadic and impressionistic, and people's own desires probably affect their claims (cited in Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 19).

Others, however, claimed a considerable degree of success in the Northern Suburbs as well as in Retreat in terms of the numbers who shopped in their own areas instead of at white-owned shops. In Retreat the black-owned shops closed later than usual (Interviewees 6, 7).

While the consumer boycott was largely voluntary, there were cases where intimidation was used to implement it (Jordi, 1987: 90). In some instances recalcitrants were forced "to eat detergent, raw chicken and rice, or to drink cooking oil" (Jochelson & Obery, 1985: 11). In the Bishop Lavis area children, when asked to draw pictures about the consumer boycott, made drawings of people being forced to drink cooking oil (Interviewee 1) and in at least one area, Bonteheuwel, looting delivery trucks was seen as part of the consumer boycott (Interviewee 2).

The consumer boycott in the Western Cape was called off in January 1986 apparently because of declining support (Jordi, 1987: 90), because most students were no longer

boycotting classes and the whole situation had changed.

### 3.2.4 SUMMING UP

Before proceeding attention should be drawn to the following salient features which characterised the boycott during this period:

a) Despite the clashes with the security forces, the boycott at this point was primarily school-based, i.e. activity centred around the SRC and the APs it organised. The general political situation was discussed and students were given reports of what had transpired at the area and regional meetings of the co-ordinating organisations like WECSAC. They often had to vote on specific issues. Shall there be a rally tomorrow or not? If so, how is it going to be organized? Who is going to do what? Would it not be better to do something else? What was our experience with the last rally? Perhaps it would be better to report back to individual classes and see what the others think?

b) Student organisation assumed the various forms outlined in 3.2.2 above as students sought to consolidate themselves organisationally as well as contend with the problems - differences over politics and strategy; the practice of democracy - which beset them.

c) Rallies at which students from a number of schools were

addressed by student leaders and speakers from outside political organisations were held. There were also placard demonstrations and marches and to other schools. These were often forcibly broken up by police. Burning barricades and violence sometimes followed police action. Numerous arrests were made. Yet, for as long as the boycott remained largely school-based, police seemed reluctant, by and large, to intervene.

d) There were also mass protest meetings, normally held at night, called by adult political organisations. These were almost always very well-attended, the mood militant and emotional. Political messages and propaganda were put across: the government was attacked, appeals were made to unity, audiences were informed about protests which were pending and, having listened to it all and having been moved by popular sentiment, had to make their minds what they thought of the whole thing and how they would (or would not) support further.

e) While the consumer boycott, it is important to note, overlapped with the other protests, it did not, like all of the above, grow out of the boycott of classes. In general it was the other issues which predominated.

f) There was forged in all this both an unprecedented popular unity, but at the same time also undercurrents of division (e.g. within WCCAC and regional student bodies).

As has been demonstrated, there were debates about a selective or a general consumer boycott; whether one was for "Liberation before Education" or "Education for Liberation"; about which course of action was most appropriate at particular points in time, and so on.

These were the main ingredients which were put together during August and which were to set the scene for what was to follow. In the wake of the Pollsmoor march the revolt was characterised by the predominance of violent clashes with security forces. In many ways the focus now shifted to the action in the streets. This led to the closure of all primary and high schools by the state and their defiant re-opening by the people.

## 3.3 THE PEAK: SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER

### 3.3.1 THE POLLSMOOR MARCH AND ITS AFTERMATH

On 22 August Allan Boesak addressed some 3 000 people at a mass rally in Rylands. He spoke about a "plan to mobilize students to engage in an act that would turn South Africa on its head". The following day he announced at a press conference that a "peaceful, non-violent and disciplined" march would take place from the Athlone stadium to Pollsmoor prison to demand the release of Nelson Mandela (Pratt, 1988: 123). Soon after this public announcement the government banned the proposed march. The UDF sent

some of its organisers to different areas in the Peninsula to find out whether or not the march should be called off. The response was overwhelmingly in favour of the march (UDF leader in Pienaar & Willemse, 1985: 12). Early on the morning of 28 August police sealed off the Athlone stadium and blocked access to it. At UCT a march by students and staff was stopped; police and students later clashed. Similarly UWC students en route to Athlone were prevented from leaving their campus. UWC staff member, Randy Erentzen, spoke about "a running battle between police and students ... lasting almost three hours during which police sprayed the campus with teargas and rubber bullets" (SAIRR, 1986: 7).

Meanwhile people who had gathered outside the stadium were chased and beaten by baton-wielding police. By mid-morning a crowd of about 4 000 had gathered at Hewat College in Crawford. They were told that it was more than likely that the security forces would use violence to stop the march. The determined crowd declared its intention to proceed. One participant who tried to introduce a note of caution was told that "the revolution goes forward on the blood of its martyrs" (Pratt, 1988: 124).

A group of clerics and nuns led the procession. The crowd was advised to sit down in the event of police action.

> Throughout, a police helicopter hovered overhead, even as the phalanx assembled four or five abreast. The snake-like procession, holding aloft enlarged photographs of Mandela, then wound its way out of the college grounds - young and old, men and women, black and white ... all resolute in their determination to face up to whatever lurked ahead. The atmosphere was charged! (Ibid: 125).

The marchers were soon confronted by police who attacked with quirts. Some in the crowd responded by throwing stones at the police, who, in turn, fired tearsmoke. A few were arrested. A priest sustained a serious eye-injury and had to be taken to hospital. Clashes between police and protesters continued throughout the afternoon. A clinic was set up at Hewat College to administer medical aid to the numerous demonstrators who had been injured. After 5pm normality appeared to have returned. But this did not last long. In the aftermath of the march came numerous reports from different areas of thousands taking to the streets, of arson, looting and stone-throwing. As the day ended twelve had died; about a week later the death-toll was twenty-eight with a further 150 in hospital. Libraries, Day Hospitals, clinics, welfare offices, etc. were closed as essential services came to a standstill. Guguletu, Manenberg and Mitchells Plain were sealed off. Other areas particularly affected were Athlone, Phillipi and Nyanga. Two days after the march, police stated they had made sixty-three arrests on charges like arson and public violence; 130 vehicles and five buildings had been damaged

as a result of stone-throwing; seven vehicles had been burnt out and eleven cases of arson had been reported (Ibid: 126-7).

On the same day as the Pollsmoor march, the government added fuel to the flames - it banned COSAS (Interviewee 3). In mid-September 1985 the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) estimated that nationally one out of every five detainees was a member of COSAS (LCHR, 1986: 13).

During this period Kasselsvlei SS in Bellville was one of the many schools where police action took place. Police surrounded the school as students met to mourn the death of a matric pupil who had been shot by security forces the previous evening and to protest against the fact that pupils and teachers had been injured in clashes with the security forces. A Casspir flattened the school fence and teargas and rubber bullets were fired as people fled. A teacher was shot in the back with birdshot as he tried to get children into classrooms during the police attack (SAIRR, 1986: 7). About 10 000 pupils from all over the Peninsula attended the funeral of the pupil who had been shot. All schools and businesses in the area were closed. The mourners marched from the church in Bellville to the cemetery in Belhar. Police were informed about the funeral arrangements and did not intervene, although some people may have been teargassed on their way back (Interviewee 4).

During the week following the suppression of the Pollsmoor march violent protests spread and escalated; the call was to "Action, comrades, action!" (cited in Bundy, 1987: 321). For instance in Mitchells Plain students adopted a more military strategy. On one occasion during this period their leaders made plans to attack white-owned shops: schools in the outlying areas had to burn tyres as decoys while the rest would march on the town centre. "I saw parents setting up barricades" (Interviewee 8).

On 4 September an eye witness described how about twenty school children who were marching in Darling street, Cape Town "singing softly", were confronted by police who "lay into them" with whips. "The kids just scattered in all directions, and most were severely beaten. Several were bundled into two police vans and driven away ... " (cited in SAIRR, 1986: 8)

Later that same day 4 000 students from all over the Peninsula held a mass rally in Athlone. A coffin labelled "Apartheid" was buried. After the rally a barricade was lit in a nearby street; the "Battle of Belgravia" (the name of a street in Athlone) had begun (Ibid). A journalist described how "at the height of the action at least five Casspirs, about seven police vans and a busload of riot police ran up and down streets firing shotguns and sending teargas canisters flying over houses into backyards". At more or less the same time 2 000 youths were lighting

barricades in Retreat and an armed crowd of 150 were throwing bombs at homes of whites in Kraaifontein. Residents in the area responded with gunfire. Similar incidents of stone-throwing and burning barricades occurred in Belhar, Hanover Park, Steenberg, Elsies River and Bellville South (Hall, 1986: 15). In Grassy Park a mass funeral for a pupil killed by security forces took place (SAIRR, 1986: 8).

The next two days witnessed a repetition of the by now familiar pattern of stone-throwing, petrol bomb attacks, barricades set alight and violent clashes with security forces. In Athlone police in armoured vehicles drove up and down streets every three minutes while students (and adults) set up as many as twenty barricades (Hall, 1986: 5). A car sticker in Cape Town asked, "Is the border in Angola - or in Athlone?" (ROAPE, 1985: 107).

On 5 September journalists were told by a police captain that, "We are using live ammunition because they are not taking any notice of rubber bullets and we cannot help it if you get hit". The following day saw reports in newspapers that the sale of firearms in the Peninsula had increased dramatically (SAIRR, 1986: 8).

Within hours after a visit on 6 September to the Peninsula by Louis Le Grange, Minister of Law and Order, and Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, the DEC closed 464 schools

and colleges; 500 000 students were affected. Rylands High, the only "Indian" school in the Western Cape was also closed (Ibid: 9).

On 7 September 20 000 people mourned the death of victims of security force action at a mass funeral in Guguletu. They were addressed by Imam Hassan Solomons of the Muslim Judicial Council who was on the run from the security police. The funeral took place despite the fact that security forces had sealed off Guguletu. On 9 September 1 000 mourners attended a similar funeral in Belhar (HALL, 1986: 11, 13).

By now there were very many high school pupils in detention. Seventeen year old Chantal, a member of her school's SRC, was arrested on 24 September. Eleven policemen were present during her interrogation:

> [A policeman] smacked me from behind on the rear right hand side of my neck. I grabbed hold of the desk to prevent me from falling over. Everybody laughed about what had happened while the questioning continued ... Then the short man smacked me on my right ear so that I almost fell to the ground and another "white" man smacked me on the left hand side of my face ... [T]he short man put both his hands round my throat and lifted me off the ground. He choked me in that position ... for about two minutes whereafter he threw me to the ground. I fell on my back. The rest of the people all cheered and laughed and one of the men hugged the short [policeman] ... [Two others] then pulled me by my hair about 5 times while I was questioned and answering ... A tall man was hitting me continuously,

> hitting me with his fists on my back ... [The short policeman] then smacked me against my right ear again ... [and] then [he] hit me with his fist in my right eye. Everyone was then laughing and enjoying themselves ... (cited in LCHR, 1986: 41).

As elsewhere in the country, the police, having denied people the right to protest by killing them, were not content to let the dead be buried in peace. Ebrahim Carelse (his wife later told one of the teachers interviewed) was on his way to greet people living opposite his house who had just arrived from a pilgrimage to Mecca. On his way he saw a crowd including policemen running in his direction. He ran into a nearby house, the police followed and shot him dead in the yard (Interviewee 3). The funeral procession on 11 September was described as "very emotional ... everyone felt [a] sense of injustice, it was very moving, very solemn ... [there was] a great sense of solidarity" (Interviewee 2). A policeman in plain clothes joined the procession with the purpose of monitoring the proceedings. A group of people killed him - they used a concrete slab to smash in his head (Interviewee 3).

The UDF called for a general strike on 10 and 11 September. The response on the first day was reported to have been varied; on the second day an estimated 50-60% of Greater Cape Town's workforce stayed away (Hall, 1986: 15).

### 3.3.2 THE PEOPLE DEFY THE CLOSURE OF THEIR SCHOOLS

When the DEC closed schools and colleges on 6 September, it meant that staff and students were denied access to school premises and that the police had the power to arrest any unauthorised persons. Principals or delegated teachers could gain access to schools only with the permission of the commander of the local police station.

A spate of public statements from various quarters condemning the action (see Pratt, 1988: 206-8) were followed by a spate of well-attended public meetings under the auspices of various community organisations. The issues which were now intensely debated concerned questioning the right of the state to close the schools and asserting the right of the community to control the schools and education. Typical of the protest meetings during this period was the one held in Lentegeur, Mitchells Plain. 2 000 people were told to "take back" their schools. A teacher declared, "We built the schools, we paid for them. They belong to the community. The government has no right to close them". Parents, teachers and pupils had to jointly "determine the kind of education they wanted". A resolution was passed which called for schools to be placed under the "direct and democratic control of the community, teachers and students" (Ibid: 210-1). These protests can also be seen as an attack against the tricameral parliament whose House of Representatives administered and controlled

"Coloured" education. People were not merely questioning the state's right to determine what goes on in the schools but, in particular, the right of Carter Ebrahim as the new "Coloured" Minister in charge of "Coloured" education to do so under the new dispensation. That "new dispensation", it must be recalled, had been opposed by every extra-parliamentary, anti-apartheid organisation throughout the country during the previous year.

On Tuesday 17 September the black people of Cape Town planned to "take back" their schools in defiance of the official closure. This was announced in more than 100 000 pamphlets distributed over the previous weekend. Demands included freedom of SRCs to function, control over curricula to be given over to PTSAs and one education system. Workers were requested to accompany their children to school (Jordi, 1987: 103; Hall, 1986: 16). All extra-parliamentary, political and community organisations, irrespective of ideological tendency supported the call (Pratt, 1988: 211). Mass meetings were held virtually all over the Peninsula (Interviewee 3) but not in some places like Bellville South (Interviewee 4). Crowds which varied from 100 to 1 000 were in evidence at fifty schools in the Peninsula (Hall, 1986: 16). In Atlantis few people turned up possibly because a fourteen year old boy had been shot the previous evening and security forces had patrolled the area throughout the night. In the Wynberg-Diep River-Grassy Park-Retreat area which included twenty-three

schools about 1 500 pupils, 1 300 parents and 500 teachers demonstrated at various schools. In Bonteheuvel Casspirs blocked the gates of schools, there was a heavy police presence and roadblocks were set up so that few people came (Interviewee 2). On the other hand at Cathkin SS, in spite of a mass meeting attended by between 400 and 500 people and the fact that the area was "thoroughly pamphleteered", hardly any parents and a few pupils supported the re-opening and this for no apparent reason (Interviewee 3). Similarly hardly any parents demonstrated at Kasselsvlei SS in Bellville or at Belhar SS (Interviewees 4, 5). In contrast at Livingstone SS (Claremont), 400 staff and parents and all the pupils assembled. Mitchells Plain was said to have been "quiet" (Pratt, 1988: 212-3).

A teacher recalled that at her school, teachers who had been "sitting through the boycott watching videos and doing knitting" surprisingly participated in the demonstration to re-open the schools because they were "very angry" at the closure. She stated that apart from possible political motivation, another possible reason could have been that they thought this was a chance to get back to normal schooling. Most of the students (at this stage the majority had been staying at home), most of the teachers and some parents all demonstrated in protest on 17 September (Interviewee 1).

At a number of schools (e.g. Elswood SS in Elsies River)

the security forces kept a low profile and crowds dispersed after they had demonstrated on school grounds or had been instructed by police to leave (Interviewee 6). A notable exception was Alexander Sinton (Crawford) where 4 000 people gathered. Early the morning police entered the school premises and arrested about sixty parents, teachers, pupils (as well as the school principal) and journalists. The rest of the crowd gathered in the school quad while the police seemed to be waiting for reinforcements. Pupils then hijacked vehicles and blocked off the surrounding areas; cars were "parked strategically" at exits from the school. The police and the people whom they arrested were trapped. The siege lasted for about three or four hours. Parents, some of whom, "were opposed to the whole thing, went berserk and with their bodies cordoned off the school" (Interviewee 9). Reinforcements arrived and the crowd was eventually forced to disperse. Burning barricades and violence followed in the wake of the siege. Motorists gave petrol for bombs. About 173 arrests were made at Sinton; they were released after paying R30 admission of guilt fines for trespassing. Fines were paid by parents who had followed those who had been arrested to the police station. The mood now was to fight to the very end (SAIRR,1986: 11-2; Pratt, 1988: 213-4; Interviewees 7, 9).

The united action of parents, teachers and pupils in re-opening schools led to the formation of numerous PTSAs. For example, between 19 September and 10 October, PTSAs

were formed at Salt River, Wittebome, Livingstone, Belhar No 2, Kuilsriver and Heideveld high schools (Jordi, 1987: 108). In all twenty-one PTSAs were formed in the Western Cape in 1985 (Matiwana & Walters, 1986: 27). However most of them did not last long (WIP, 1986: 27) partly, if not mainly, one supposes, because the Emergency as well as the on-going violence made it difficult for people to meet.

The attempt made by the people to establish control over education, to defy the state and Carter Ebrahim and what he represented (i.e. tricameralism) was an event of crucial ideological significance. It raised the whole question - and it raised it on a mass scale and in the heat of the uprising - of the community's democratic right to control its social life. In addition, it was a concrete issue which united parents and students. Whereas previously the boycott had been characterised by broad political concerns, the consumer boycott, street fighting, repression, what was happening in other areas, etc. ideological focus was now on the control of "gutter education" and providing an alternative to it, in other words, the focus was on the struggle in education in relation to the tricameral parliament.

Be that as it may, the re-opening of the schools in terms of the numbers that actually participated "wasn't such a great success" (WECTU teacher in Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 103). Generally speaking, parent (i.e. worker) support was

"tacit" and "limited" (WIP, 1986: 27); it did not match the student revolt in mass scale or sustained militancy. In this respect it lagged far behind. However, it must nevertheless be remembered that hundreds of thousands were forced to confront the issues thrown up by the boycott in their homes as their children related the eventful happenings of the day, as they heard of the detention of relatives and neighbours, as the latest pamphlet informed them and as the "Mellow-Yellow" police trucks, the Casspirs and Buffels and Ratels (armoured cars), and the wailing ambulances kept on reminding them. Early in September one Athlone resident remarked, "The police in two days have done the work of thirty popular organisations in politicizing our people and in making everybody a potential guerilla" (cited in Hall, 1986: 30). And so at a mass meeting of schools in the Elsies River area parents were "furious" at the police and "very sympathetic" to the boycott; a good relationship was built up between parents, pupils and teachers (Interviewee 6). This did not mean that all parents were supportive, even if passively so. Some (probably a minority) were totally opposed to the whole thing. At a meeting of parents, teachers and pupils called at Kasselsvlei SS some parents blamed the principal, the SRC and teachers "for the whole mess", although other parents did not agree and said so. The meeting and the debate lasted almost five hours (Interviewee 4).

### 3.3.3 VIOLENT INSURRECTION; THE EMERGENCY IN THE W. CAPE

In the wake of the re-opening of the schools, an ominous form of "pre-emptive" police action now became manifest as people in Valhalla (Elsies River) and Guguletu where beaten by security forces for no reason at all; it appears as though they simply moved into these areas and attacked whomever they found (see Hall, 1986: 16-8; Interviewee 6).

The impact of such incidents in the aftermath of the re-opening of the schools and the violence which followed immediately after it, was an escalation of protest and insurrection. PTSAs continued to mushroom; on 30 September rallies were held in Wynberg, Rylands, Athlone and Grassy Park. On the previous day, at a mass meeting organised by Guguletu's Parent Action Committee, it was resolved to continue the boycott (Hall, 1986: 18). On 1 October 4 000 university and school students at a mass rally decided to return to school the following day but to continue the boycott of classes as well as other forms of protest (SAIRR, 1986: 13).

As pupils returned to school for the final term in early October, they were met with an array of edicts by Carter Ebrahim which effectively ensured the continuation of the boycott. All "unrecognised" meetings were banned; speakers from political organisations were not allowed on school premises. Principals were empowered to deal with anyone

who "hindered the education process" - eviction and/or expulsion were suggested. 370 security guards were posted at schools. At Bonteheuvel SS, a security guard van was firebombed and at Crystal SS they were chased away (Pratt, 1988: 237). In most cases it appears these edicts were ignored (Interviewees 2, 3).

For how long could all this be sustained? There was now talk, especially after students had been at home for about ten days during the school holidays, of ending the boycott. The Inter-regional Forum (IRF), a new body which replaced WECSAC and which was now co-ordinating the boycott, agreed that students would end their protests if the following minimum demands were met: postponement of the final exams; unbanning of SRCs and PTSAs; removal of security guards from schools; reinstatement of progressive teachers who had been transferred; dropping of charges against pupils arrested during the boycott; payment of state bursaries; dropping of the age-restriction at Department of Education and Training (DET) schools; allowing awareness programmes at schools (SAIRR, 1986: 14).

But this was mere talk, suggestions. During the next three weeks violent insurrection in the Western Cape reached its peak: " ... security forces and residents in townships from one side of the metropolitan area to the other clashed daily ... rallies and meetings in schools were usually broken up by security forces, burning barricades were daily

erected across township streets and vehicles and shops were stoned". Practically all Cape Town's black areas were affected. On 9 October it was reported that for the first time shots were fired at police from behind a barricade in Mitchells Plain (Hall, 1986: 19). And then six days later, on 15 October, police hiding in crates on the back of a South African Railways' truck "cruised up and down Thornton Road, Athlone, past several groups of youths. When the youths eventually stoned the truck, which they felt was provoking them to do so, the soldiers jumped out of the crates, fired randomly and killed 3 school children" (SAIRR, 1986: 15). The following are extracts from an eye-witness account of what occurred as police fired through the open door of the house where the family was hiding their own and other children for safety:

> Two of the younger children were cowering on the bed just inside the door. Andrew (aged 7) was shot in the arm, leg, chest and hip. Thabo (aged 10) was shot through his leg and thigh. Michael (16 years) was shot under one arm four times.
>
> Jerry, aged 16, was one of the children who had gone outside. He came crawling back inside on all fours. We didn't realise it then but he had been shot in the head. He staggered into the other room and collapsed on a bed where he died seconds later. A nine year-old child who had been playing in the street on his bicycle was also shot dead.
>
> I slammed the door shut but four police came to the house and kicked it open ... They dragged Jerry's body roughly off the bed and across the floor. They tried to drag another child with them but my mother pleaded with them to wait until his father

> came ... Another child outside who was terrified told the police that I was his mother so that they would let him come inside. They told him that if he came in he must not say anything about what he had seen. Then the police went around the house and picked up all the shot pellets and left (LCHR, 1986 48-9; see also the account in Pienaar & Willemse, 1986).

Police were not keen at all to release the bodies of the "Trojan Horse" victims. They surrounded a prayer meeting at the St. Athans mosque in Athlone; a shooting battle ensued, police fire was returned and Abdul Friddie was shot dead by police. Thousands attended the funerals of all those killed (SAIRR, 1986: 16).

On the day of the Trojan Horse killings, 15 October, ASAC which represented sixteen Athlone schools and twelve schools in the Mitchells Plain area called for a boycott of the final exams. Meanwhile Allan Hendrickse, leader in the Labour Party controlled House of Representatives which had been set up under the tricameral parliament, announced that he had a list of some forty-two school principals and teachers whose activities in "assisting the boycott" were being investigated (Ibid).

On 25 October DET matric exams were due to start. Early that morning sixty-nine Cape activists were detained. The next day the state of emergency was extended to eight magisterial districts in the Western Cape and Boland and

one hundred organisations were banned from holding meetings. Security forces were empowered to detain anyone or everyone they thought could endanger "public order" for two weeks. Six days later they were empowered to detain anyone "without notice to any person" for as long as the emergency was in force. Pupils were restricted to classrooms except during intervals, were banned from any activity not part of the official syllabus and were confined to their homes when not at school. Six children in Std 6 were arrested for illegally playing football at Rocklands SS and four pupils who were standing on a pavement were, in the opinion of the police, holding an illegal gathering and therefore arrested! On 2 November newspapers were banned from publishing "any riot situation" during the period of the emergency and only journalists approved by the Department of Foreign Affairs or the police could report on the "unrest" (Hall, 1986: 20-1).

During the eight month period of this, the first state of emergency, the average daily death toll rose from 1.67, the 1985 pre-emergency average, to 3.44 (LCHR, 1986: 12). Extensive arrests were made under the new regulations. Few of the women detained at Pollsmoor were interrogated; many were only briefly questioned (Interviewee 1). The men were held at Victor Vester prison. Most were questioned for about half an hour. They were would be told that the police knew they were ANC members, that their friends had already confessed, that their fingerprints had been found

on hand grenades, that they were going to be held in any case so that, all things considered, they may as well talk (Interviewee 5). Few detainees were tortured, probably because of the large numbers in detention at this particular point in the Western Cape. The national picture in regard to the whole of the unrest period was very different (see Webster, 1987; LCHR, 1986; CIIR, 1988). In the Western Cape there were at least two horrific instances of torture during this period (see Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 55-60; 65-6).

On 7 November all 510 pupils at Zeekoevlei high school were arrested, but released soon afterwards. The state was clearly at war with the whole community - the enemy was everywhere. And so from now until the end of the year people were arrested or detained after clashes with security forces or simply for no reason at all (Hall, 1986: 21, Interviewees 1, 5).

### 3.3.4 SUMMING UP

Four points are important about this period:

a) Mass action in the form of the Pollsmoor march brought in its aftermath violence to an extent hitherto unknown in the Western Cape. The violence was accompanied by large scale anarchy, chaos and militarism which, consequently, was often destructive. In addition, it spread illusions

regarding the extent of student power and their ability to physically win what was in many ways an unequal battle - armed with stones and unadulterated, raw courage they threw themselves at the military might of the government. Aggrey Klaaste, a journalist, called this period "the age of the gun and tearsmoke" (cited in Mufson, 1990: 2). Yet violence also implied some measure of organisation; it fuelled militancy and hardened intransigence, cutting the ties which bound the oppressed to the oppressor; it created a revolutionary atmosphere in which other forms of mass action could take place; it forced participants to think strategically; it cemented unity and camaraderie. It was all these things at the same time.

b) The state was forced to do something. In desperation it decided to close all the schools in the area. This only served to make everybody even more angry but, more importantly, the anger was coupled with very definite ideas concerning the popular demand for democratic control of education. Also thrown into sharp focus was opposition to the tricameral parliament and by implication what should replace it. In this way, the 1985 boycotts were linked to the mass campaigns by all extra-parliamentary organisations during 1984 to boycott the government's latest constitutional dispensation. People were called upon to embark upon more mass action, even though not that many of them in fact did so. They were also confronted with the question of the role of the wider community in what

hitherto had been a largely student struggle. This was best epitomized by the formation of numerous PTSAs.

c) The insurrection which followed the re-opening of the schools led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Cape. This time, however, no heightened struggle was to follow.

d) When the violence started to subside towards the end of October with the declaration of the state of emergency and the arrests which followed in its wake, the boycott as a form of protest characterized by awareness programmes instead of formal lessons, but more especially by mass meetings, rallies, marches, street violence, the defiant, atmosphere which prevailed ended. The mood and the conditions now changed markedly as caution replaced defiance and division, unity. The period which followed concerned the events which occurred during the final examinations, the division which took place over whether or not to write and attempts made nationally to end the revolt.

## 3.4 THE DECLINE: NOVEMBER, DECEMBER-MARCH 1986

### 3.4.1 DIVISION

As the intensity and scale of violent clashes with the security forces declined, the cracks of division set in.

If the period up until the re-opening of the schools (and for some time after) can be characterised by unprecedented student unity in protest and action, then the last few weeks prior to the final exams can be characterised by division. Worried students and parents as well as those who were more conservative began to urge an end to the boycott. They were supported by organisations such as CAL, NUM and groups within WECTU. Many students (probably most initially), however, saw a return to classes as a defeat because their demands had not been met (Jordi, 1987: 110). Almost all organisations distanced themselves from the slogan "Liberation before Education"; yet this concept was implicit in the idea of boycotting until all the demands are met.

Right from the start of the last term at the beginning of October calls were made (e.g. at a mass meeting in Kuilsriver) for students to return to class and to prepare for the final exams. As the exams approached and the violence subsided such calls became more urgent. The question which then arose was whether the decision to call off the boycott should be made by the students (who were generally more militant), or by their parents (who were generally less militant) (Ibid: 112-3). An ASAC pamphlet stated:

> Just like workers have to decide whether or

> not to strike or teachers decide to down tools, so we must decide on our own actions. Student democracy therefore has to be preserved - not undermined. Yes, parents do have a say in our decisions. They can help us and advise us - but not decide for us. Our parents' duty is not to decide on the boycott but to look at ways of how we can begin to control our schools, determining what we learn, how we learn and who teaches us (cited Ibid).

An alternative view held that any decision to return to classes had to be taken by the community as a whole. The TLSA in particular criticized students for not looking at opposition in the schools as part of the wider struggle for democratic rights and for thinking that they alone could bring about change. The education system was the product of the broader socio-economic system (and not the other way round). In the TLSA's view it therefore followed that whatever happened in the schools and whatever decisions regarding a return to classes had to be taken, had to include the wishes of the wider community, particularly, those of parents (workers) whose interests were primary (see TLSA, 1985a, 1985b; Sutton, 1986c: 5).

The CPTA urged students to return to academic classes while WECTU, at its launch, "debated at length", but did not resolve, whether it should support student decisions or propose alternatives which entailed a partial return to normal classes (or leave the decision up to the students - Interviewee 3). CAL supported the boycott but opposed the

idea of an indefinite boycott; it felt that by about the end of August students should have returned to classes (Neville Alexander in Pienaar & Willemse, 1986: 137-8). UWC students and college students decided on their own to return to lectures in mid-October. Pupil militants "felt betrayed". Disruption squads forced them to review their decision which they subsequently rescinded (Jordi, 1987: 113-4; see also WIP, 1986: 27).

At the start of the last term fifty-four schools and colleges decided to continue the boycott but some schools were returning to classes. In the Bishop Lavis area large numbers attended classes for about a week during the September holidays (Interviewee 1). In Mitchells Plain MIPSAC listed a number of short-term demands before a return to classes could be considered (Jordi, 1987: 114). As was noted above, by mid-October (after the Trojan Horse killings) the Mitchells Plain schools under MIPSAC and the Athlone schools under ASAC decided not to write the final exams (Ibid).

On 13 November the IRF reduced its earlier demands to the following: postponement of exams to early 1986; removal of security forces from school grounds; release of detained pupils and teachers (Ibid: 117-8).

Two weeks later the Joint SRCs (Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga) and a group of Student Action Committees said that the IRF

had not been properly mandated by all its affiliates; they then listed the following demands: lifting of the state of emergency; withdrawal of troops from the townships; unbanning of COSAS; right to form PTSAs and SRCs; release of detainees; reinstatement of suspended teachers and expelled students; abolition of age restriction in DET schools (Ibid: 118).

On 28 October the IRF, which claimed to represent more than eighty of the 110 high schools in the Peninsula and Boland issued a statement which called upon students not to write the examinations and which condemned those who "stab our struggle in the back by going against democratic decisions" (cited in SAIRR, 1986: 17).

In the event many, including, as I discovered during the interviews, some of the most articulate and militant, wrote the final exams. The above IRF statement was "arrived at at leadership level" (Jordi, 1987: 115) and, in the light of the fact that so many students wrote, cannot, I think, be viewed as a reflection of the true sentiments of the rank and file. It may be assumed that student militants wanted to push for a continuation of the boycott despite the feelings of their constituencies. Their view was probably influenced by all they had gone through in previous weeks; to go back now must have seemed like a betrayal of their struggle and everything they had thus far sacrificed. One teacher stated that students had "booed

me", had accused her of no longer being "in the struggle" because she had advocated a return to classes at this time. This was despite the fact that she had been one of the five or six teachers out of a staff of fifty who had been supportive of the boycott and up until then had enjoyed the confidence of the student leadership. But then, in the end, the whole school wrote - while she was in detention (Interviewee 1).

But even if students had had the best (democratic) intentions in the world, it was extremely difficult to implement these given the general situation. The first two weeks of October saw street battles taking place in Phillipi, Lansdowne, Mitchells Plain, Crossroads, Belhar, Hanover Park, Athlone (and probably other areas as well). Then followed the Trojan horse killings. By 25 October 2 000 violent clashes had been reported since the Pollsmoor march and about sixty-three had died. One journalist remarked, "In the Western Cape civil war has broken out. There seems little justification for calling it 'unrest'" (Jordi, 1987: 110; see 115-6). Many leaders were, of course, in detention and meetings were banned. In Bonteheuvel (and probably other areas as well) the student leadership had "for months on end" been on the run, but they still came to school to organise (Interviewee 2). In these circumstances it was extremely difficult and dangerous even to arrange a meeting to discuss anything. Many students were not at school so that even if mandates

were properly collected they did not reflect the feelings of the majority. Moreover, this was also a period of considerable confusion and disagreement in student organisation at regional level: WECSAC was on the decline and the IRF and WECSCO were beginning to emerge (Jordi, 1987: 117).

According to three WECTU teachers:

> About half the students eventually wrote exams. The proportion varied from school to school with numbers ranging from 0-90%. The exams created deep divisions amongst students, parents and teachers. These were carried over into the new year. Student divisions lay mainly between those who had written and those who had not. Parent and teacher decisions also varied. For example at Harold Cressy the PTSA agreed that students should not write exams and not one exam paper was set. In Mitchells Plain large numbers wrote even though they were involved in protest activities (cited in WIP, 1986: 26).

The DEC insisted as early as mid-October (Jordi, 1987: 118) that the exams proceed despite calls from various quarters like the CPTA, WECTU and the IRF, for a postponement. A deputation of forty principals met the Executive Director of Education, but the meeting proved fruitless. Similarly the heads of UCT, UWC and the Peninsula Technicon met the State President, but to no avail. A joint statement by 155 organisations also fell of deaf ears (Pratt, 1988: 173-4, Vince, 1985: 18). As far as the DEC was concerned, the examinations were a form of punishment against pupils for

having defied them for months and for having successfully challenged the status quo. In addition, the examinations, far from serving any educational purpose, were also used as a tool to break student unity. Hence the DEC used an array of threats and special concessions to entice those who were dithering to write (see Pratt, 1988: 155).

Apart from the political objections students and teachers had to writing the final exams, there were sound academic ones as well. From the start of the boycott at the end of July there had been no formal classes. On 6 September schools were closed for two weeks. Neither was the atmosphere of daily beatings, arrests, detentions, etc. conducive to study. Some pupils were concerned about careers; others were concerned about political principles. Parents clashed with their children; their children clashed among themselves. One (probably exceptional) parent declared, "I'd rather my child graduate from slavery to liberation than from one grade to another (cited Ibid: 161, also 158). At Sinton the SRC disaffiliated from ASAC in 1986 because it felt that those schools in Athlone at which pupils had written exams and/or had been promoted should be expelled from the organisation (Interviewee 9). At many schools there was friction: "it was almost impossible to teach"; "pupils wanted to fight one another" (Interviewees 2, 6).

### 3.4.2 THE FINAL EXAMINATIONS

The South African Defence Force (SADF) supervised the exams. There were reports of students being forced to write at gunpoint, of exam rooms being teargassed, of students and teachers being arrested. Matric pupils who wrote Typing at John Ramsay (Bishop Lavis) had their exam room stoned (Interviewee 1). At Kasselsvlei a whole class of hysterical pupils, their teacher and a group of anxious parents were arrested and detained for two hours because pupils had laughed at a policeman during the exams (Interviewee 4). At Mountview (Hanover Park) pupils tore up question papers and sprayed water; at Lentegeur (Mitchells Plain) 300 policemen and soldiers moved in after pupils had attacked cars; at Silverstream (Manenberg) the school was surrounded by six Casspirs and four Buffels as classrooms were searched and pupils questioned; at Belhar No 1 teargas was fired and four teachers detained; at Groenvlei (Lansdowne) three teachers were arrested and, when the principal cancelled the exam for the day having obtained DEC permission to do so, the police ordered him to proceed with the exams, threatening to arrest him if he did not (Pratt, 1988: 187-8; Vince, 1985: 17).

Matric exams started on 2 November under police guard at the military base (!) at Wingfield (SAIRR, 1986: 17). On the first day 13% wrote, by 5 November approximately 25% wrote and 38% wrote the last papers at the end of

November. Candidates were allowed to write supplementary exams in February/March 1986 if they submitted affidavits explaining the circumstances which had prevented them from writing at the end of 1985 (Hall, 1986: 23). 155 anti-apartheid organisations condemned the exams as a farce and a fraud. "Gross irregularities" were reported. For example at Cathkin SS Biology papers written three days earlier at Manenberg SS were given to pupils (SAIRR, 1986: 18); some pupils wrote exams for the wrong standard; others wrote up to six hours a day; all pupils were examined on the entire year's work whereas no academic work had taken place during the latter half of the year. At Bonteheuvel SS certain teachers gave pupils question papers before they were supposed to write to get good results and pupils wrote question papers which teachers had set for the June and/or September exams. "Marks were cooked" - up to fifty or sixty marks were added to final results by teachers who had been instructed by principals, who had been instructed by inspectors ("of education"!) (Hall, 1986: 22; Vince, 1985: 17; Interviewee 2).

Teachers' comments included:

> The only way to explain it is bizarre. The police behaviour is bizarre. They go through the classrooms, check the scripts, not knowing what they are doing. Imagine writing an exam with a huge cop carrying a shotgun leaning over your shoulder checking what you are writing, especially when a week or two back those same cops were firing birdshot and teargas at you and sometimes killing your

buddies.

> The exams are a complete and utter farce. The police think they are going ahead, but the students just sit there pretending, writing poetry, drawing, writing diatribes against the police. In the midst all this the police pull students out of classes at random, taking down names and addresses, and there is a real fear they will go to those houses after school and intimidate the students into giving them information (SAIRR, 1986: 18).

WECTU called on all teachers not to administer the final exams. Court action to challenge the suspensions from their jobs of those teachers who refused to administer the exams was dismissed with costs. Carter Ebrahim stated his intention to "put an end to this kind of thing [legal action] where they [pupils, parents and teachers] believe they have the authority to challenge the minister. I have the authority" (cited in Jordi, 1987: 121). The whole staff of Alexander Sinton in Athlone as well as the whole staff of Harold Cressy in central Cape Town refused to administer the exams. At Rylands eleven teachers were dismissed and a further eleven transferred (Hall, 1986: 22; SAIRR, 1986: 17, 20; Vince, 1985: 17-8). By the end of the term in early December 130 teachers (according to SAIRR, 1986: 20) or 190 (according to Pratt, 1988: 194) had been victimized. Very few of WECTU's 2 000 members (Hall, 1986: 23) had therefore heeded the organisation's call in regard to administering the exams. In the same way that some pupils were concerned about their careers, most

teachers were now concerned about hanging onto their jobs.

By mid-December violent clashes "continued on an almost daily basis" but no longer with the same widespread extent. The consumer boycott was formally called off on 23 January with the support of community organisations. On 30 December forty-five leading Western Cape activists were released from detention; their political activity was "restricted" (Ibid: 25).

Schools closed early in December. Amidst isolated incidents of violence and armed insurgency, house-to-house searches, the detainees' hunger strike, apparently illegal candlelight vigils (see Ibid: 23-5) and WECTU's failed attempts at getting the courts of the rulers to set aside the DEC suspension of scores of teachers, the fateful year drew to a close. The tension and charged atmosphere relaxed somewhat. One could sense a collective sigh of relief. And yet concern for the many in detention remained and a feeling of unease persisted as the new year approached.

### 3.4.3 THE DECEMBER SPCC AND THE MARCH NECC CONFERENCES

At two conferences held in December 1985 and March 1986 attempts were made to end the school boycotts nationally. The Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee (SPCC) had been elected at a meeting called by the Soweto Civic Association

to discuss the crisis in education in October 1984 (see Mufson, 1990: 246-7). The SPCC got in touch with the DET, the SADF and the Department of Law and Order with a view to arranging a meeting. Only the DET met the Committee. The most urgent matter discussed was the postponement of the final exams which the DET was not at all keen to do. As the weeks went by the DET adopted a more intransigent attitude and eventually insisted that the exams take place as scheduled. Principals then unilaterally called off the exams (CACE, 1988: 2). Further talks with the DET which at one stage included the Minister of Law and Order as well, proved fruitless (see Jordi, 1987: 25; CACE, 1988: 3). However, the DET did eventually agree - there was not much else it could do - to defer the exams. The SPCC sent a delegation to meet the ANC in Harare. It was agreed that students should be urged to return to school. This appeared to be the general sentiment amongst parents (Jordi, 1987: 25; CACE, 1988: 3; Mufson, 1990: 248-9; Wolpe, 1988). But what about the students? On 28 and 29 December 1985, 162 organisations, composed of affiliates of the UDF and the NF met at the University of the Witwatersrand. Jordi (1987: 26) writes that "The tone of the meeting was set by strong criticisms of the slogan `Liberation before Education' ... Instead, under a large banner bearing the call `Education for People's Power', speaker after speaker emphasized the need to prevent the school struggle from degenerating into anarchy". This had been the main purpose of the SPCC initiative (CACE, 1988: 107-8; Wolpe, 1988). It was decided that students would

return to normal classes but that certain demands had to be met by the end of March when the situation would be reviewed. Other important decisions were made as well (see Jordi, 1987: 27; PIE, 1986).

Not everyone was happy with the conference decision to return to school; a section of the youth "continually agitated for the most extreme tactics" (Jordi, 1987: 52). In many areas of the country the boycott continued (see Campbell, 1986a; Lodge in Lodge & Nasson et al 1991: 101-2). Towards the end of March, Molefe Tsele of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) said that, "Nationwide there is evidence that the education crisis is far worse than it was before the Wits conference ..." (cited in Jordi, 1987: 4). By April 1986 it was estimated that 100 000 pupils were still on boycott. The DET continued to close schools in different parts of the country (CACE, 1988: 109).

The SPCC and later, the NECC, found it very difficult to operate. Just before schools were to open for the new year, the government banned discussion of the December conference resolutions in eight areas of the Transvaal; in the Western Cape a report-back meeting was also banned. Organisations had been badly hit by detentions and were experiencing problems in regard to communication and obtaining mandates (Jordi, 1987: 51-2).

The national consultative conference to discuss the crisis in education held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1985 elected representatives from eleven regions and they, together with the SPCC officials became the NECC. It met for the first time in March and, after the second consultative conference held in Durban, began to operate (Ihron Rensberg, NECC member, in Obery, 1986: 8).

At the second conference at the end of March Inkatha supporters attacked the delegates; two were killed. The NF withdrew from the Committee; it stated that the NECC was "undemocratic(ally) and manipulative(ly) constituted", but did not rule out any further joint action with the organisation. The Durban conference noted that all the demands previously made had not been met, it nevertheless strongly rejected the idea of a student boycott (Jordi, 1987: 29).

### 3.4.4 THE WESTERN CAPE: 1986

In the Western Cape pupils returned to class on 28 January; 38 000 had not written the final exams (SAIRR, 1986: 22). While an uncertain calm settled in the schools and while there were occasional flashpoints; it was clear that for most students the boycott had ended. Late in January 1986 137 organisations issued a lengthy statement in which they called on students to return to classes (Jordi, 1987: 30). Nevertheless, two important issues still dominated the

educational arena in the Western Cape: what was to happen to those students who had not written the 1985 final exams; what was to happen to the scores of teachers who had been victimized by the DEC in one way or another? (Pratt, 1988: 194).

At certain schools pupils who had not written the 1985 final exams decided to promote themselves to the next standard. On 7 February Carter Ebrahim renounced his earlier "We will not give them an inch" (cited in SAIRR, 1986: 23) and gave schools the option to promote pupils without having to write further exams and on the basis of past academic performance; or set exams for those who had failed as well as those who had not written at the end of 1985 (Pratt, 1988: 196).

Some schools decided that non-writers would repeat the year. The whole issue left a rather bad taste in the mouth: often the very students who shouted the loudest about "commitment to the struggle" were now viewed as reneging on their stand and "bolster(ing)" the aims of gutter education by insisting on promotions without having to write exams (Ibid: 187). WECTU stated that "Mass promotions would be anti-educational if no sound basis could be found for such promotions" and that the objections to the December 1985 exams also applied to the proposed March 1986 exams (SAIRR, 1986: 24).

While these matters occupied the minds of most pupils and were the cause for a considerable degree of chaos (and division) in the normally chaotic DEC schools, the Bonteheuvel area appeared to be the only place still in the throes of open revolt, reminiscent of the days of October 1985. The situation there had little impact on what was happening elsewhere in the Peninsula; it revolved around essentially local politics and events (Interviewee 2).

Amidst all the drama at Bonteheuvel SS, WECTU continued its protest against the dismissed, transferred and suspended teachers in its "Hands Off Our Teachers" campaign. On 14 January 300 of its members broke the emergency regulations and marched to the DEC offices in Roeland street, Cape Town. They demanded, inter alia, the unconditional reinstatement of all victimized teachers, the readmission of all students to schools and the withdrawal of security forces from school premises. A delegation met the Director of Education, Mr A J Arendse, who stated that security forces would be removed from school grounds and that those students who had failed the 1985 exams would be allowed to continue their schooling. Most of the dismissed or transferred teachers were reinstated, but the DEC remained determined to press charges against those teachers it alleged were guilty of "misconduct" (SAIRR, 1986: 22-3).

On 3 March, seven alleged ANC guerrillas were killed in a gun battle in Guguletu. On 14 March shebeens were closed

and a candlelight vigil was held in Wynberg as a sign of respect for the men. Restrictions imposed by a magistrate were ignored by some 30 000 mourners. ANC flags and symbols dominated the proceedings as it had done at most rallies and protest meetings throughout the country (Hall, 1986: 26).

## 3.5 CONCLUSION

These were terrible times in terms of the suffering caused. A strong nerve is required when reading about the horror catalogued by organisations such as the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1986) and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (1988). There were very many people, including seasoned activists, who were shocked when they discovered the nature and extent of the reign of terror the South African state had unleashed upon children and the nation as a whole. What is one to make of some of the events related in this chapter? About the story of thirteen year old Moses Mope who on 21 October 1985 was on his way to church in Atteridgeville when a white policeman simply got hold of him, beat him and trampled on his body? He was taken home covered with blood. "When I touched his stomach, he pulled away in agony," said his father. "I also noticed his jaw was cracked and he was injured in the head and other parts of the body." He died on the way to hospital (LCHR, 1986: 2). Or about what happened to fifteen year old Dominic

Ntlemenza in November 1985 in Crossroads? An eyewitness stated:

> This boy was walking and then I saw the casspir come down the road. One policeman jumped off the casspir and shot the boy. The boy tried to stand up and then they shot him in the head.

The next day Dominic's mother learnt that her son's dead body had been found at the side of the road (Ibid: 32). When one looks at what was happening nationally, then these were NOT isolated or exceptional cases (see, for example, LCHR, 1986; CIIR, 1988; Webster, 1987).

The boycott was unprecedented in scale and duration. The experience was a profoundly intense one - in terms of the passions aroused, the atmosphere which prevailed, the pace of events and the suffering it left in its wake. A student representative from UWC declared:

> Our schools will never be the same again. Too many of our people have been killed, injured or detained ... Our memories are filled with the sacrifices our parents and students have made (cited in LCHR, 1986: 14).

By March 1986, the boycott in the Western Cape (but not nationwide) had definitely come to an end. Everything, with the help of an array of emergency regulations and the ever-ready security forces, was ostensibly "back to normal". What was the meaning and significance of the

events for the participants five years later? To what extent, and how, did the events and involvement in them shape the political consciousness of the actors? The rest of the thesis tries in various ways to answer these and related questions in terms of the interpretation of the boycott that has been developed in this chapter.

Like society the uprising cannot be thought of as a monolithic, static phenomenon characterised by set features; that is the image one all too often gets when reading the literature. The point about it is its fluidity and the potential for change, of one set of conditions and circumstances developing into something else. Therein lay its revolutionary potential. In the same way that the students in Soweto on 16 June 1976 did not know that the police would fire on them and did not know that their actions would ignite a nationwide revolt (Mufson, 1990: 16), let alone a decade and more of mass struggle, so the Western Cape students, like everyone else, did not know what would follow next. (Their initial response, we saw, was to call for a two-day boycott.) What at one stage was thought possible at another appeared impossible and <u>vice versa</u>. At the beginning and at the peak student unity seemed (and perhaps in fact was) almost unbreakable and student power invincible. Those who were not in favour or who did not actively participate, either did not matter or had effectively been marginalised. Yet, as stated, during the course of the last school term all that changed thus

necessitating different tactics. What is important and what I have been at pains to show in this review of the events is that, viewed as a whole, the thing moved. What caused the movement?

As was mentioned at the start of this chapter, the engine which drove the boycott consisted of the interaction between word and deed. I wish to illustrate this below in two ways: by looking at the broad sequence of events and by looking at a few specifics. In the discussion which follows it is shown that to conceive of the revolt as something in motion is inseparable from the elements which enabled the movement to occur.

Once the boycott started and the main elements - APs instead of normal classes, student organisational structures, mass meetings and rallies, etc. - were in place, the scene was set for the uprising to develop and unfold. The spark was the Pollsmoor march. This event (itself an act associated with recognisable ideas) created a qualitatively different situation; it was followed by widespread insurrection as the action shifted to the streets. Then came the closure of the schools and the ideological meaning that can be attached to this occurrence, and again widespread violence. This time, however, a state of emergency was declared, and then the protests declined into those bitter disputes about the final examinations. At its peak then, the deeds and

practice of resistance produced ON A MASS SCALE ideas with which the actors were confronted. The only exception was the consumer boycott which originated in other parts of the country and therefore cannot be said to have organically grown out of the local conditions. The consumer boycott, nevertheless, did place important ideas on the political agenda in the Western Cape as well as in the rest of the country. For instance, apart from what has already been discussed, White (1986) has argued that, in addition to forging a popular unity, as a tactic consumer boycotts can be used to put pressure on local capital and hence local authorities, as well as put pressure on the central government into giving in to certain demands. As a strategy consumer boycotts can help sow division between local capital and the state it supports. Another example: Seekings (1986: 27) points to the specific implications consumer boycotts have for women:

> An almost ubiquitous sexual division of labour gives women the responsibility for ensuring that there are meals on the table. If there is not, then it is the women who have to explain why. Consumer boycotts can compound the effects of economic recession and make it increasingly difficult to fulfil expectations. The temptation to break the boycott, not in opposition to the boycott's aims but in order to purchase cheaper food can be very great. If in-town prices are lower than those in the townships, then it will be women who risk facing youths "supervising" boycotts (Ibid, see 27-8).

As for the rest, at virtually every point during the

schools' boycott decisions had to be made in respect of the many issues which had been thrown up. For example, as was shown above, the question of whether or not to call off the boycott concerned, in part, the question of whether or not students should decide this on their own, or whether or not their parents and the wider community had to have a say in this matter. It raised related questions concerning the role of the wider community in the struggles at the schools and the whole question of worker/parent involvement in the struggle generally. It placed the struggle in education in the context of the struggle for freedom in general. Also relevant here was the less militant nature of worker involvement in the revolt generally: so, for example, one could very well have asked how can parents be allowed to decide whether or not pupils should return to class when their support was for the most part half-hearted to begin with? Let us quickly and at random look at a few other examples. The children take to the streets, there they clash with police and can reflect upon the repressive nature of the South African state, what opposing it entails or will entail, etc. or can practically learn how to avoid Casspirs (they can't reverse easily one respondent told me), and that it's a good idea to bring along more than one set of clothes because this makes it difficult for the security forces to identify you as you move in to attack and then retreat (as another interviewee stated). Student representatives attend regional meetings and then discover that there are different political tendencies within the

broad liberatory movement about which they had hitherto known little or nothing. What is better: a selective consumer boycott or a general one? Why? Which organisation is advocating what? Use force and intimidation to implement the consumer boycott? Decisions also had to be taken regarding attitudes towards "Liberation before Education" or "Education for Liberation". Significantly, it becomes irrelevant as to whether or not any decisions are made formally, "in the head"; the kinds of action (or inaction) in which people engage, their behaviour, speak louder than words about what their position on any matter is. And so on.

How the participants confronted these and similar ideas and whether they did so successfully and adequately are vital questions which will be explored subsequently, but for the moment what is important is the conception of the boycott I have formulated. That conception is contained in what I set out to investigate and is related to how this was done. In addition, it is applicable to the broad sequence of events and can also be discerned in so many of the actual situations which people were forced to face. In sum, the principal theme of the thesis and its variations (as discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) are rooted and contained in:

a) the events themselves;

b) the pattern of events as they actually unfolded.

As far as I know there is at least one writer who has applied a roughly similar analysis but to a somewhat different topic. Anthony Marx has surveyed the opposition to Apartheid between 1960-1990 using the following guidelines:

> Two sets of questions have guided my inquiry. First, what are the central ideas around which opposition has been organized and how have these ideas been 'seized by the masses' as ideology and influenced their actions? Second, how have state policies, economic conditions, international pressures, and the interpretations of these determined the ideology and actions of the regime's opponents (1992: 235-6).

This approach is not problem-free (one would have preferred that he makes material conditions - reality - the starting point), but that is another issue; I refer to Marx's work simply to show that, very broadly, my interpretation of the dialectic involved in the events of 1985, of how those events can best be understood, has been applied by him to the whole the period 1960-1990. He, for example, sees the clash between the Black Consciousness Movement and the UDF between 1980-3 (Ibid: see ch 4, also ch 7) as a clash between theory and practice.

The next two chapters, therefore, examine the political consciousness of the respondents in terms of the boycott

conceived as action and the boycott conceived as thought because this rebellion, like Chiron the centaur, was half-man, half-beast:

> You must know, then, that there are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is that of men, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second. It is therefore necessary for a prince to know well how to use both the beast and the man. This was covertly taught to rulers by ancient writers, who relate how Achilles and many others of those ancient princes were given to Chiron the centaur to be brought up and educated under his discipline. The parable of this semi-animal, semi-human teacher is meant to indicate that a prince must know how to use both natures, and that the one without the other is not durable (Niccolo Machiavelli in The Prince, cited in Marx, 1992: 265).

Using the above analysis, it may at this point be useful if the reader is given an outline of what is to follow.

The next three chapters are structured around the idea of studying the 1985 uprising as the reciprocal interaction of theory and practice. First, in regard to perceptions about the boycott as action, I shall mainly be concerned with demonstrating the range of different and conflicting opinions which cropped up during discussions with former student leaders and how, sociologically, one can account for this (Chapter 4). Second, I shall show that in regard to the boycott viewed as the expression of ideas, the great majority of respondents are still struggling to grasp the

wider issues which were thrown up during the course of 1985-6 (Chapter 5). Third, in Chapter 6, I try to tie the findings of the previous two chapters together, i.e. I compare the conclusions in relation to one another and forward explanations for them. In brief, I shall argue that, ideologically, the respondents can today be regarded as the children of the kind of rebellion they made.

Finally, in the course of the analysis, methodological questions came up and these have been incorporated into the above analyses.

**NOTES**

1. This is largely a summary of the existing secondary sources. These were supplemented by nine interviews with persons who in 1985 taught in eight different areas in the Western Cape and someone who at the time was studying at UWC (see references). These interviews were conducted simply to gain a broad picture of what had transpired. It should be emphasized that I have not tried to write an historical account of the boycott; the primary aims of this chapter are stated in the introduction. Given these purposes, I came to the conclusion that the secondary sources were adequate and, apart from the nine interviews, thought it unnecessary to use other sources such as, interviews with key participants, pamphlets or newspapers. I do not agree with some of the facts derived from the

secondary material although I have used them nevertheless. The section on student organisation relies heavily on Jordi (1987) because his is the only secondary source which deals with it in any detail. This must count amongst the most under-researched topics on the '85 boycotts. The "real" story of what went on in those committees (as well as the "real" story about the struggles which were fought within the committees of the various political organisations and the role they played generally) still has to be told.

2. ALL the problems I try to grapple with in this study have nothing to do with a peculiarly "ethnic" fascination for things "Coloured"; nor do I find it strange that these "Coloureds" ("South Africa's cockneys" - Herbstein, 1979: 181) participated in struggle in a manner so similar to "Africans" that this amazing phenomenon requires special study in the manner in which Bond (1984) has done.

**CHAPTER 4**

# THE BOYCOTT AS ACTION[1]

> Let a hundred flowers bloom; a hundred schools of thought contend! - Mao Tse-tung
>
> ... what do a trade unionist, a Tory, a racist, a Christian, a wife-beater and a consumer have in common - THEY CAN ALL BE THE SAME PERSON ... (from a review by Ross, cited in Mercer, 1990: 57, emphasis in the original).

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In participant observation it is generally accepted that the material gathered by means of interviews should be checked by what the researcher sees or observes in the field. The reason is that studies have shown that what people tell interviewers and what they do in real life are often not the same (Kadushin, 1990: 15-6; Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 73; Spradley, 1980: 10). Because I relied primarily upon interviewing and not extensive observation, I tried at least in some measure to overcome this problem as follows: respondents were questioned on what happened during the boycott not to discover which events occurred but how events are perceived today (see the guide questions in Appendix B). The information gathered in this indirect way is, in the main, analysed in this chapter. Kathleen Raine says the following about her autobiography:

> What at some other time I might have called my story, I cannot say; for we select in retrospect, in the light of whatever present self we have become and that self changes continually (cited by Du Boulay & Williams in Ellen, 1984: 247).

The aim of this chapter is twofold:

a) to define the nature of respondents' political consciousness in regard to mass action and;

b) (in the conclusion) to explain and account for it.

Simply put, the central argument I shall be developing is that key features of the boycott are today viewed from different and conflicting perspectives - simultaneously. I shall try to illustrate and unravel the multiplicity of meanings and attitudes related to me during the interviews by looking at the former SRC members as a group. Trends within the group as well as exceptions or significant minority opinions will also be reviewed.

There were those who tended to praise the boycott and those who tended to condemn it. I have used this as rough indications of present attitudes towards mass action. The line between these two extremes has become blurred for most. In by far the great majority of cases, individual respondents' opinions were, for instance, radical in some

ways but conservative in others. There was, in other words, no consistency in opinion when one examines everything that was said during the course of individual interviews. Let us look at two case studies taken at random.

Simon can be described as politically apathetic. He told of a rally he had attended as though he really did not want to talk about it; it seemed that the whole topic of conversation was not of much concern to him and that, frankly, he did not care. Now and then he sighed, cleared his throat and impatiently tapped his fingers on the desk in front of him. At times his responses were tortuous, laboured and indistinct. Simon, I thought, was doing me a favour by agreeing to the interview. On the other hand, it was a Sunday morning, and it must have required some effort to get up so early in order to meet me at the school. More substantively, I wondered why he attended those SRC meetings so regularly? Why not, like so many others, stay away altogether? He expressed frustration at the SRC for not getting things done and not organizing things properly, but also defended it against some of the criticisms I suggested some people had made. He said he was definitely not in favour of the government and because of the way in which he said it, one could not help believing him. He described himself as "more of a sportsperson", was not politically involved, yet is prepared to assist in political campaigns (pamphleteering, I thought). With the

final exams, he continued, one could really see who cared and who did not. He did not write for the sake of solidarity and not (I presumed) out of political conviction. He was also critical of parents' opposition to the boycott and saw nothing wrong in students protesting against detention without trial. As the interview progressed I formed the opinion that he thought the boycott had been an altogether bad experience. I was somewhat taken aback when he told me that he thought it was both good and bad and mentioned that it had opened many people's eyes. I took it he meant it had politicized the community.

Similarly, Lionel said he did not belong to any political organisation at present because he was a Christian and that he would, if given the opportunity, vote for the National Party: "I think that they [the government] are genuine with the decisions they are making at the moment". Furthermore, like the state-controlled television, he tended to blame the ANC for the present violence implying that the government was doing its best under difficult circumstances, but that people like Mandela were not doing enough. Yet, he stated he was prepared in future to go on strike if the cause is just. He recalled the difficulty students had in winning parents onto their side, implying that as a young adult he would not like to be an obstacle to any popular opposition to the <u>status quo</u>. He was also one of the few people who was presently more in favour of the boycott than against it.

My argument, then, is that whether one looks at them as a group or as individuals, for most of the interviewees key features of the boycott are today seen from differing and often opposite points of view.

The discussion below focuses on four aspects of the boycott: rallies, violence, awareness programmes and the SRC. These were selected because they epitomize the various forms action during the boycott took. As I have said, the latter two features were particularly prominent during the initial stages of the protests when the school-based SRCs organized activities, while taking to the streets after police had broken up rallies characterised the boycott during its peak. "Action", then, is viewed along a continuum ranging from planning protests such as placard demonstrations and awareness programmes, decision-making, debates and report-backs instead of normal schooling, to mass protests in the open and physical confrontation with the security forces. Analysis of each demonstrates variations of the foregoing interpretation. I intend to show the wide range of different views in respect of rallies, APs, etc and at the same time state what the predominant opinion in each case was.

## 4.2 RALLIES

The most significant aspects of rallies concerned the atmosphere which prevailed and the emotions they evoked.

When I asked respondents what about the boycott they remembered particularly well, references to the rallies featured prominently. In the section of the interview dealing specifically with rallies, five respondents mentioned the singing, chanting, slogans, the spirit and feeling of unity and solidarity as having characterized the rallies. Zelda, for example, said that at rallies you felt "you can do anything". Alongside all this excitement and euphoria was the fear of what would happen once the police, who were almost always present, would do next. But the fear was not debilitating. One could say that the emotional atmosphere at rallies was just as important as the speeches. Avril recalled:

> We went. We prepared ourselves ... We wanted that ... that excitement. We knew it would happen ... That's why we had an Action Committee ... They did not go to learn anything, they went for the action.

In the descriptions of rallies related to me, I picked up among three or four interviewees what could be called a revolutionary activism which was associated with bravery, tenacity in battle, standing one's ground, engaging the security forces and wanting more than anything else to do so, tactical prowess and so on. These attitudes and the heady times in which they were forged are all still part of the thinking of a small minority and were often recorded with pride. Below I examine three examples.

What follows was recalled with much relish:

> I remember very well (laughs) ... That day the police surrounded Steenberg High (smiles) ... and the students refused to disperse and you could nicely feel the spirit of the boycott. And ... the students were not afraid and they stood their ground. And one believed that if you are in the struggle then you must expect some to die and others to survive (Tania).

For Tania that "spirit of the boycott" was fondly (almost reverently) recalled and one can take it that the belief that some have to die was something she has internalized and which today she accepts as a necessary price to be paid in the fight against tyranny. When she says that the demonstrators "stood their ground" etc, it occurred to me at the time that she was not only relating what had occurred, but probably how SHE behaved. This also came out in other remarks she made: corridors were locked to stop the faint-hearted from running away; police fired teargas, but still students did not disperse.

James continued the story about the rally held at Steenberg. Here we have a somewhat different variation of the activist theme. As he spoke I could almost in my mind's eye see him fearlessly leading the rest into battle (whether he actually did or not I cannot say). I sensed that he was reliving both the fear and the militancy and also the urgency of the times. For him personally I formed the impression it was without doubt the latter two aspects

which predominated. There was nothing romantic about his description; on the contrary it seemed to me he had his feet firmly on the ground when it came to the tactics to be employed when faced with forces of law and order. Moreover, he knew only too well that from them and their ilk no mercy could be expected; he had no illusions about what they were capable of and what opposing them would entail.

> We basically armed ourselves with ... pieces of wood and stuff that was lying around and the fire extinguishers that was there, we took off. We unrolled a big hose pipe that was there 'cos it got some force ... We were obviously gonna be hurt when they come in ... We stood there, we told them if they want to come in they gonna have to take us all and everybody stood together ... They burst in and they started beating up students and the principal spoke to the officer and they called them back and then the students said they can rather go now because they don't want to get hurt and don't want to get arrested.

Fear of what could happen and almost relief that things did not turn out as badly as one at first thought co-exist, side by side with a preparedness to face the consequences regardless. In all probability James would act in the same way when confronted with a similar situation in the future. In all probability, too, he is and was able to quickly sum up the situation and know which course of action would strategically be the best to follow so that casualties, for instance, could be minimized. In fact James was a member of the "Action Committee" whose primary function, he said,

was to see how students could be protected when violence erupted. He was, I thought, well-suited to serve on that committee.

Let us look at a third example. In a very similar vein, Brian described another rally. It was supposed to have been held at Immaculata SS but when pupils got there, they were locked out. They - some 15 000 of them - marched down Ottery road to Wynberg SS. At the rally which was held there:

> ... six police officers in ... riot gear came onto the stage and removed our speaker which was a very dumb thing considering there were 15 000 students there and they were charged by the students and they were actually thrown with bottles and bricks and there was a whole lot of bloodshed on their side and being in front I witnessed all this and ... they actually let the ... speaker go, but then they did another dumb thing, two of them drew guns on the students ... and they pointed it at us and then the students only bombarded them with bricks and bottles and things and they came out more casuals [i.e casualties] on their side ... and they had to ... retreat. Then they called in their Casspirs and people started running and scattered all over the place and ... everyone just ran into anyone's house ... and the people kept us in until after five [pm] when the police cleared out ... I was one of eighteen people trapped inside ... [a house] the smell of the teargas came in and all the students were suffocating and choking ... the police riding up and down the streets shooting and arresting everyone. That rally will always stand out to me, among others ...

What impressions did he form at the time, what did he think of the whole thing?

> It was exciting ... it was very exciting. It gives you the satisfaction, like you know you can hurt these guys ... I mean you're sitting with all that rage and that fury and that anger and you feel good when you go home that night knowing that look, you did them some damage, you're costing the government some money ...

Brian had not only cast off any docility he may have had, he had learnt that he and others could inflict damage on the all-powerful state, that it was possible and conceivable to engage the rulers - and win! One may argue that students had "immediatist" illusions regarding their political strength, but such illusions were forged in battle, when they saw, as Brian saw, that they actually could (physically) hit back with a measure of success. An element of invincibility prevails in all uprisings of this kind wherever they may occur and it is that which distinguishes them from normal times; ordinarily it is unthinkable to storm the Bastille or the Winter Palace of the Tsar. Later in the interview he told me that before the boycott he had been very uncertain of himself but that during the boycott all this had been cast aside. In many ways rallies were about defiance: there was our respondent together with 15 000 others and the hated police - all six of them! - think they can disrupt the proceedings (the nerve!). The police, for whom he has nothing but contempt, drew guns but far from submitting, (he is very pleased to report) the students responded more angrily and in more

determined fashion. Clearly they have to be taught a lesson and Brian is as excited and thrilled now as he was then at having won the skirmish (albeit partially).

There were four respondents who had nothing but praise for rallies. But this was praise of a particular kind and should be distinguished from what has been discussed thus far. Mogamat, for instance, went so far as to say that rallies were, almost by definition, good: "If we had a big group present it was a success ... If people spoke well and articulately then that was a success". After a rally held at Heathfield SS, students were beaten and teargassed. The next day the talk at the school centred upon things like, "Do you remember how we got the one policeman. How we scaled the fence?" The beatings, arrests, etc. are almost made to sound pleasant. These arguments are reminiscent of the propagandist literature on student boycotts which was discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.2). It is useful to draw a distinction between the kind of praise illustrated above (which in my view was justified) and the kind of perspective adopted here which is far too triumphalist. Although these respondents were referring to rallies, I got the feeling that they meant (or at least implied) that the entire boycott was, by definition, good. Achievements tend to be exaggerated; defeats do not exist. The mere fact that the boycott had taken place made it praise-worthy and justified whatever occurred.

In contrast to all of the above, the majority of respondents either criticised rallies or both praised and criticised them. Although what has been discussed so far represent extreme, minority points of view, they were nevertheless detected in the attitudes of most interviewees. The overall impression is that rallies tended to be viewed from a militant perspective. Let us illustrate.

Rallies were even more disorganised than the APs, said Rafieka. And, in a negative, resigned tone:

Rafieka: [Rallies] ... could have been a good idea if they were better planned, more organised, if the people who had attended were not (sigh; laugh) [more] interested in what was going to happen afterwards ... A lot of people especially, you know, the less interested ones ... would go to rallies ... to meet people from other schools.

EW: Social occasion.

Rafieka: Social occasion.

The sigh and the laugh are significant and possibly suggest that the form rallies were supposed to take often did not work out in practice. In this sense rallies, for Rafieka and a few others, were failures - they did not work out as planned; the students who had gathered there were not serious enough; the rally which was supposed to have some kind of political message or significance, was being turned

into something else. This kind of perspective tended to come from the leaders and organisers. Instead of trying to justify or romanticize past actions, instead of nostalgic recall, we have realistic assessment of the merits of key features of the boycott.

> Nothing came of them [rallies]. Although the speakers spoke a lot of good things, people weren't listening. They were just interested in what form of action or whether this boycott would go on or not ... All they wanted to hear was that the boycott should continue (Shanaaz).

In regard to the "action", she said that, "I don't think life should be played with unnecessarily". She conceded that sacrifices were inevitable but added, "We have no right to take decisions like that ... People were killed. Yes, good came out of it, but we lost too many". It was pointless fighting police armed with bullets with stones.

I do not know whether these respondents can in fact be said to have been critical of rallies. It certainly does appear that they did not object to the demonstrations in principle and that they felt that there were aspects of the form which the rallies took which was wrong and that, perhaps, these could have been corrected.

For some respondents like Jane some rallies were successful but not others "... it was 50-50". A rally held at Lavender Hill had been a success but,

> ... the one at Wynberg ... was chaotic ... there was nothing in it ... students were walking in and out of the school ... the speakers never turned up, there were no teachers around ... Nobody benefitted anything from that rally ...

Anarchy is seen as destructive, as having no use at all. Again there seems to be the implication that things could have been done better, but were not and that the latter need not necessarily have been the case. It is also interesting that Jane described the rally at Lavender Hill as successful because one of the speakers had managed to put across a political message in the manner, I would imagine, in which a teacher may gain the keen attention of a class of pupils during a successful lesson. She described the talk as "very good" and the students were "well disciplined". A rally planned mainly in order to ignite violence had to be rejected: " ... you don't play around with something like that because you could be playing with your own life". A successful rally was "where pupils are interested in what is being said", where the message was understood and people are brought up to date with the latest developments. This is in contrast to the respondents cited earlier who thought that rallies were basically good: for some of them what was important was the psychological mood which prevailed and/or the physical confrontation which accompanied or followed the rallies. When I asked respondents what the purpose of rallies were,

some replied referring to the psychological factor in a positive sense while others referred to it negatively. An interesting example of this is Avril. I cited her above referring to students going to rallies "for the excitement" and because they wanted "the action". The reader may be surprised to note that she went on to say that rallies were marred because of these intentions on the part of students. This kind of seemingly contradictory attitude is indicative of most respondents' opinions. Similarly:

> ... I went to about five [rallies], I think three of them were successful ... Because I could see (laughs), how can I say, there was solidarity and people really could see that ... at least some of 'em ... understood what was going on ... at one rally ... I remember seeing ... there was such a lot of people. At that time I thought geewiz the struggle will really work if we all stand together ... I thought Yisee! we really giving up something, education, to, to, fight against, I mean, Apartheid. If we could just let other people see what was happening. I mean in the community everybody ... was against us ... You could have tried how hard to convince them but they just didn't want to understand (laughs). AND NOW YOU CAN SEE THEY WERE RIGHT (Helen; emphasis added).

What are lengthy descriptions conducted in a positive tone and which capture in a manner similar to the descriptions of Brian, James and Tania, the atmosphere which prevailed, are ended by negative comments; the lines separating "good" and "bad" are not clearly defined so that often something "positive" would be said but this would soon be qualified with "negative" remarks. In this way militancy and

conservatism become unlikely bedfellows.

How do we account for the above? There is undoubtedly a difference between the rational thought gleaned in quieter circumstances (when researchers conduct interviews) and the gut response during times when the clamour is for everyone to take to the streets and, as Gramsci once put it, "to act, to act, to act". On the eve of the outbreak of the boycott, when all was blissfully conflict-free and quiet, who would have predicted that such bloody rebellion would eventually engulf the whole country? Who, too, would have predicted that so-and-so would in a matter of hours play such a prominent role and with such flair too? The "reasonable" and the "rational" (as opposed to the wildly militant) is directly related to the social context. During revolts the normally held quietist views are quickly cast aside and "extremist" opinions, in line with the general, contemporary social conditions, become the order of the day, and on a mass scale. This partly explains, as I shall presently illustrate, the noticeable reasonableness of the views on violence as well. Raymond remarked at one stage that it was one thing to ask questions now and to try to think of answers but that at the time people responded emotionally to the situation which confronted them. There was no time to consider what the best course of action would be. In other words, the social context in which the interviews were conducted differed markedly from the social context in which the rebellion occurred. Hence what people

think and do now can only be regarded as an indication of what they are likely to think and how they are likely act in future assuming (and this is vital) social conditions remain the same. The method whereby the empirical material was extracted centred upon talking about a past rebellion at a time when, relatively speaking, peace and quiet prevailed. The inconsistency in opinion in thus PARTLY explained.

## 4.3 VIOLENCE

Closely connected with the mass rallies was the violence which often accompanied or followed soon afterwards. Police almost always refused to allow rallies to proceed. Rallies then came to represent and symbolise a demand for the right to protest in the open and to engage in physical confrontation in defence of that right. Some students were critical of rallies because many would attend because they wanted fighting to break out.

At the time it appears that the prospect of violence was viewed as part of what one could call the "excitement of it all", as part of some kind of adventure which was almost enjoyable. In 1976 a journalist wrote that "Rioting in the Mother City is a combination of Cloud Cuckoo Land, Carnival and mayhem ... Never negate the real violence ... but floating above it all ... is a feeling rather akin to Derde Nuwejaar" (cited in Van Heyningen et al, 1976: 38-9).

There was a hint of all this in the content of the next extract; it came out even stronger in the manner in which the events below were related:

> We were in Rylands ... The roads were blocked ... Some students ... [came and] told us that they'd blocked off the school. I think it was the time when Sinton was, when they circled the school or something. Anyway we were told that we had to create a diversion in Rylands ... to like get their attention away from Sinton ... I remember at the back of the school [Rylands High] ... a couple of guys ... were making petrol bombs and some other people went to the flats to collect the tyres they had stored there, the Action Committee, and then we went to the main road and they stopped a bus and they petrol-bombed the bus and then we were running from the main road because the cops started shooting at us and I remember we got to the Post Office ... [a] helicopter was chasing us (laughs). There was like a big group of us ... They started shooting from the helicopter and ... they shot ... [the person in front of me] in the back and ... there was blood (short gasp, laugh) all over the place ... Then we had to run through the school because [the] helicopter was still hovering above ... there was a hole in the fence and we had to climb ... through the hole ... and then we were running across the field (laughs) and the cops charged from the side ... Most of us got through the fence and the rest of the people ... were beaten (Rafieka).

Fun, adventure, thrills - in stark contrast to the content of what is being related. A few respondents stated in connection with rallies that most students did not listen, hence "you don't learn much at a rally" (Zelda); students went out of curiosity (Rafieka) or with the idea that, "I have a friend at that school so, I'll go along" (Simon); some went because they were interested in members of the

opposite sex (Simon, Shamiel, Ruth).

> I don't think all understood what was happening at the time ... it was just ... "Hey, I'm going to a mass rally, go with" and, you know ... the police used to come and that used to be the excitement, somebody got beaten up, some people actually used to find this so exciting ... or now you can also say you got sent to prison ... (Ruth).

As with some of the objections regarding aspects of the rallies, there is in all of this implied that these features of the boycott were regrettable and that they had no place in the student struggle. It is as though their presence is seen as detracting from what one could call the nobility of a cause at which much was at stake. On the other hand, there is no question that for some respondents, as I show below, this kind of criticism simply meant criticism and even condemnation of the boycott as a whole.

In contrast to this element of "fun" or adventure, violence is also, still today, very seriously viewed. I shall examine two different examples: In the first extract violence is associated with anger at being treated unjustly. There was nothing frivolous about the following account; rather there was a strong sense of "how could they have done this?". Violence is seen as something awful and its indiscriminate use as unnecessary, unfair and unjust.

> We had gone to a rally at Hewat. My brother-in-law and myself ... He hadn't

> actually gone with me. He came to fetch me ... He got out of his car and was on his way onto Hewat's campus when the cops got hold of him and they hit him and he got two birdshot into his legs ... He was a married man with kids who had just come home from work ... And then also I had a boyfriend at that stage who was very actively involved. He was directly connected to the bombing of an MP's house. And when the cops got hold of him, they ... weren't sure whether it was him or his brother they were looking for ... and in the end they actually hit his brother and yet they were looking for him and his brother had just come from Jo'burg and his brother was laying unconscious in hospital ... and I witnessed them hitting him ... (Shanaaz).

One could almost add that she meant to say, "and I shall never forget nor forgive them for what they did" because that was the outraged manner in which this was recalled.

A number of respondents told me that although they did not, they often felt like throwing stones during 1985 because of all that had happened. Two stated that they did not think a peaceful protest would have had sufficient impact. Some, like Mogamat, still feel like that today, which brings me to the second example. It was right, he said, that students used violence. The police were the aggressors. "Violence must be met with violence". He did "not believe in the Christian saying of you turn the one cheek and you turn the other bloody cheek". Referring to me Mogamat continued:

> I don't know where you were. For people

> engaged on [the] battlefront it was certainly [a] feeling of "We are winning, we are achieving something. Kill one of us and we'll kill two." This is the irony of the whole situation. Today there is no talk about retribution and I'm bloody angry because they've messed up people and we entered the battlefront with the idea that if we don't get them today, we'll get them tomorrow. And now they going to talk of immunity to everyone and amnesty to everyone. That's not right. You don't take away this hurt which you've inflicted upon people for generations by just saying, "We forgive and love all".

He went on to say that what was required was "pluck" and courage and, contemptuously, "You didn't need brains", in order to physically confront the security forces. If there was some measure of doubt as to whether Shanaaz was bitter about the experiences she described, there can be little doubt that Mogamat still feels, because of the violence the state used in order to suppress the boycott, there are a number of scores still to be settled. I got the impression that at this point in the interview he was speaking to the tape recorder, i.e. that he wanted to put these things on record. This did not, I think, detract from his anger or the fact that he really believed what he was saying. Here, too, violence is certainly not thought of as part of any adventure. What is possibly significant is that despite the fact some respondents told me (after I was asked to switch off the recorder) that they had participated in violent acts, I came across no instances of the deliberate use of terror or anything suggesting such an attitude.

Mogamat's remarks (and one or at most two others) were the nearest I discovered which associated violence with a war against an enemy which one must defeat (nay, annihilate!) no matter what that entailed.

All the perceptions in respect of violence reviewed up until now were exceptions. What struck me was that most respondents gave very reasonable, considered and almost passionless opinions regarding the use of violence. The kinds of views which the establishment newspapers like to imply the majority of ordinary, hard-working, decent people hold dear. Most did not agree with the use of violence and thought that it would have been better to use peaceful methods of protest only.

A few interviewees expressed reservations about the looting, setting up barricades and burning tyres and the fact that innocent people were hurt. And one detects, here and there, a kind of elitist distaste for all the mayhem and blood-letting. At the same time there were some respondents who simply could not see the point in what they stated was indiscriminate stone throwing. Violence "didn't achieve anything", it was not "worth it", they had guns; we only had stones, etc. but these respondents could, at the same time - and they were at pains to stress this - understand that the protesters had been driven to it. Almost everyone blamed the police for the violence and, significantly, saw nothing wrong with pupils, in the

circumstances, defending themselves. Rafieka, for example, said that she felt driven to violence during the boycott. "You just felt very angry and there's nothing you can do ... " She did not think it was right to use violence. "Sometimes they just couldn't help it ... " It would have been "much better" to protest peacefully only. Similarly:

> Look ... you must understand. We did not have any weapons and these people had the right to do anything, to break as they wanted and whatever they wanted. If they decide to enter a school or a meeting, they are now going [to get at] you, then they do it violently ... They opposed our struggle with violence ... The only correct means to counter-attack was with a stone. To defend oneself ... So I think yes [the use of violence was justified] ... (Raymond).

The voices of reason were not pacifist.

On the other hand, three interviewees were very critical of the violence and were not as understanding in respect of students being forced to use it as was the case with the majority.

> Well what went on around here, I don't think was right, it was very stupid ... I mean what they did. They destroy their own things ... Mess up the road, break the robots and such things and tomorrow it must be repaired again and they have to pay for it and now the cars make accidents at the robots ... It was mostly gangsters that carried on like this. Then one did not see the students (Simon).

The use of "they" says much. Simon, I thought, like many

parents and the state, could not only understand why the protesters were acting violently, but often did not understand why they were protesting in the first place. This lack of understanding explains their antagonism and criticisms - and their abstention as well. It also explains why this kind of argument so closely resembles those of the rulers. Molteno (and especially Volbrecht, 1977: 1-10; 30-5; see also Hirst, 1973: 234 ff) has usefully dissected some of the notions concerning "riots":

> 'Riotous behaviour', as opposed to the actions of supposedly 'civilised' people, tends to be conceived as impulsive, spontaneous to the extent to which it is not directly manipulated by 'ringleaders', 'foreign powers', or 'alien ideologies', and uninhibited, rather than the product of reason, established tradition, and the restraints of 'normal' life. Implicitly or explicitly, 'rioting' is usually portrayed as irrational and formless, deviant and destructive, inappropriate and immoderate, many-faced and primitive (Molteno 1979b: 67).

He goes on to state that attention is drawn away from the social conditions which resulted in "rioting" and instead focuses on the "rioters" themselves who are viewed as "politically subversive, temporarily insane, or criminal". (For examples of this in the boycott literature, see Van Heyningen, et al, 1976: 22-3, 27). All this, he says, is how the ruling class sees the world (Molteno, 1979b: 67). What interests us is that this is how some of our respondents, albeit a minority, tend to view the world as well.

In some ways similar to Simon's line of thinking was the response of Tania who pointed out that it would have been better not to let the state form such a dim view of the protesters. To have protested peacefully only would have stopped the government from making accusations that blacks "want to achieve something but they break down their own things". It would have been better if they had come to the conclusion that black people "discuss things like civilised people". For Tania the important thing was somehow for the oppressed to get into the good books of the rulers. And there is almost embarrassment that "our" people could behave in this way and embarrassment (although this may be stretching the interpretation a bit) that one is part of such a community. Significantly, she qualified her views by saying she could understand that people had to defend themselves when attacked. Violence, she stated, should only be used if peaceful methods do not work.

I suggested earlier that not all criticism should necessarily be associated with opposition to the boycott and all protest. It is sometimes difficult to categorise the criticisms. However, in the above two cases there can be little doubt that criticism of violence, although it meshed with opposing attitudes, can be equated with conservatism and opposition to mass action.

## 4.4 THE SRC

What views did interviewees have in respect of the organisation which stood at the helm of the protests, the organisation to which they belonged?

There were five respondents who reluctantly recalled what had transpired at SRC meetings as though they were speaking about a bad experience, something they would rather forget and put behind them. One interviewee referred to the SRC meetings as a "headache" (Avril); another said:

> ... we used to end up ... not achieving anything in the SRC meetings ... one rep would end up arguing with another on some technicality, on something very petty ... and this argument would continue on and on and on ...
> when students go ... and report back to their classes they'd have nothing concrete to report back ... Because of the disruption in the SRC meeting, the entire school would end up disrupted.
> ...
> Some people might think ... we can discuss this for such and such a reason [and others would disagree] ... Then we would end up with arguments and people angry with each other, people walking out of SRC meetings. Totally disrupted. People not even respecting the chair ... just screaming across the room at each other ... (Fatiema).

At the other end of the spectrum, is the description of James. It is noteworthy because whereas some of the respondents appear to recall SRC meetings tortuously with an emphasis on the negative aspects, he shows a kind of

enthusiasm which is directly related to the energy and itch to act (to move, to get things done) with which he probably threw himself at all the activities of the boycott; this was the manner in which he spoke about the rally at Steenberg and in which he related the following:

> In the SRC meeting we were specifically told to go and report back to the students. I, for number one, went. I had my notepad that I wrote everything down on as soon as I came into the class, I had to write everything on the board, like the agenda ... And I discussed with them what was actually happening and what decisions we were gonna take and I asked them what their views were ...

There were those who disliked the proceedings in the SRC meetings and recalled them in a resigned way and as painful memories; there were also those, like James, who had revelled in them and still revel in recalling them.

In a different way, with reference to the individuals involved, Raymond sang the praises of the SRC:

> ... our school had one of the strongest SRCs ... Those were people one could admire ... They were well-organised, responsible, gave the correct lead and the reason was the atmosphere ... all the events which occurred drove them to their utmost and that was why they could serve us so well.

The analysis - social conditions are the cause - is perceptive. I agree with the praise he has for the individuals; this should not be viewed with scepticism -

1985, like other revolts elsewhere, produced many of them. Hobsbawm (1973: 83) relates an epitaph he heard spoken by the comrade of an anarchist terrorist who was killed by police in Catalonia: "We were young and the Republic was founded, we were knightly but also spiritual. We have grown older, but not he. He was a guerrillero by instinct. Yes, He was one of the Quixotes who came out of Spain". There is another side to this coin: the ruthless use of terror (sometimes accompanied by arguments that the ends justify the means), although I found no such examples.

A few respondents both praised and criticized the SRC. For instance Shanaaz said that anybody who disagreed with the Executive was ignored. The majority ruled; the minority "was not respected what they stood for". The Executive met before the general meeting and most of the time succeeded in persuading the rest what they should do. But, as "executive members, they really thought about what they were doing, they weren't just going into things blindly most of the time" and the student body did exercise democratic control over many things.

The overall impression one gains regarding perceptions of the SRC tends to be that it is viewed from a critical perspective reflective of opposition to the boycott. Apart from what has already been discussed, this conclusion is based on numerous remarks such as: little was achieved at SRC meetings (Simon). On the other hand, one could also

cite other little statements such as, "I think we were a very efficient SRC" (Mogamat); "I was impressed with what they tried to do" even though the programmes often "flopped" (Nawarda).

It is thus not very clear how the SRC is perceived. I suggested to respondents various criticisms that were made of the SRC and asked for their comment. According to Nawarda criticisms of the SRC depended upon whether or not one favoured the boycott (there is much truth in this remark). There were two points, reviewed below, which emerged from this discussion which are important in that they give added insight into the nature of the political consciousness of the former student leaders.

There were a few respondents who agreed with the criticisms I suggested to them concerning the SRC in what one could call a self-critical way:

> I suppose in a way we did waste time. I mean there was a lot of ... unnecessary things that we did and I mean ... [those who said so] were right about [the SRC] being disorganised ...
> There were ... unnecessary meetings that we had to discuss like really silly things: what students were going to write on their placards and what ... songs they were going to sing ... I just don't think some of the stuff were necessary and then there were ... people that organized the action, the tyres and petrol and stuff like that ... I think that was unnecessary. It was very dangerous, I suppose, for the students (Rafieka).

Five years had elapsed since the boycott took place. This enabled some interviewees to distance themselves from the events so that evaluation of their actions had become part of their thinking. This is implicit in both the content and the tone of the above. On the other hand, the discussion below indicates that this is not always the case.

Many respondents defended the SRC against criticisms I made of it almost as if to say, "No, now you're being unfair", or "I may have said or implied that the SRC may have done this, that or the other incorrectly, but now you're going too far", or "That is simply not true".

EW: ... some people said that the SRC was undemocratic. It took decisions for the whole school.

Ruwayda: That is not true.

EW: Why?

Ruwayda: Because I personally know, we always had to go back to the class and we could not return without a mandate.

EW: Was this done regularly?

Ruwayda: Yes.

EW: And did you try to force your opinions on the pupils?

Ruwayda: No. We forced nobody to do anything they did not want to ... Some pupils did not want to go to rallies ... we did not force them, they rather went home.

In more or less the same way it was stated that the SRC was

not to blame for the chaos which at times prevailed. "We can't organise everything ... without the co-operation of the students" (Fatiema). Six interviewees mentioned that it was, consequently, not the SRC's fault that things were chaotic. Zelda said that some criticisms were fair but not others. The criticism that the SRC was being selfish, that it only propagated its own beliefs and ideas and that it did not care about the consequences was not valid. People who said this "were thinking about themselves ... my family, my mother" and not about the wider struggle. And so on.

These were, of course, former SRC members and the tendency of the majority of them to defend the organisation to which they belonged and which most of them had an active hand in building has to be borne in mind when considering their replies to these criticisms.

## 4.5 AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

Four respondents referred to their personal experiences of the APs and it is clear that for them the discussions had meant something. One can speculate that they probably eagerly participated in the debates which took place and enjoyed doing so. And what is important for our analysis is that an element of that enthusiasm for discovery and learning which their formal schooling by and large denied them, was assimilated so that the APs are still today

viewed from a progressive and not a reactionary point of view. These perceptions are rooted in "what really happened" - to them:

> If I look back to the time I started the first year in Std 6, when I started learning [about political issues], then it was a new discovery for me. It was almost as though I had discovered something [completely new] (Lionel).

But the above attitude was exceptional, for the great majority of respondents the AP experience had been a bad one.

Jane said she thought that "to a certain extent" students did benefit because "they discussed things that were happening ... on their backdoor step and they discussed it with classmates, their peers". However the focus was too narrow: things were looked at mainly from the perspective of the students and what was happening to them. Similarly, Shamiel said that there was "no link" between "student issues and ... community issues" and that the two levels of struggle were not effectively connected.

This criticism concerning the narrow focus of the student boycott is, I think, a valid one which has far-reaching implications. It resulted, for instance, in students often being under the mistaken illusion that they and they alone could change the entire system, although they were far from

clear as to how they would do this or with what they would replace it. Viewed from another angle and as I have already noted, one of the key features and principal weaknesses of the boycott was the disjunction between the more militant student struggle and less militant worker struggle. This is not the place to discuss these matters in any detail, except perhaps to remark that had the latter not been the case one would more aptly have been speaking about a revolution (and not an uprising) which had failed or succeeded.

Most of the other criticisms made of the APs were of an organisational nature and related to what respondents perceived took place during the APs.

EW: Did students benefit from the APs?

Avril: No, nobody benefitted. I can't even remember whether I learnt anything ...
nothing. I am sure if you ask any student, [they] wont even know what was discussed.

EW: A waste of time?

Avril: Yes.

APs were unsuccessful. Only when something drastic happened were they interesting; otherwise they were fun - card games were played. APs were a waste of time (Nawarda, Simon, Fatiema) "because honestly I still don't know why we boycotted. If it was supposed to teach us something, it didn't teach me anything ... we were in Std 6 and ... I wasn't interested actually" (Nawarda). The class

representatives (i.e. the SRC members) may have learnt something but the majority of students treated it as a joke (Paul, Zelda, Helen), they would "party" at the back of the classroom (Paul) or would be doing their own thing while the programme was in progress (Adiel). They were more concerned with enjoying themselves than with the boycott (Marion, Simon, Fatiema). APs were a "farce". The debates just did not work, pupils enjoyed the videos more (Zelda). The APs were not properly organised and well thought out (Zelda, Mogamat, Rafieka, Tania, Simon, Shamiel). "Most of the time they didn't want to listen and we would just ... get them to sing" (Rafieka). The problem was that students did not want to be told to be quiet or to be reprimanded by their peers (Ruwayda). There were other responses of a similar nature by other interviewees.

It has not been our intention to focus on the factual information, to try to discover, for example, whether or not the SRC was "really" democratic or to assess the degree of democracy it attained. Nevertheless, the material which has been reviewed up until now, in so far as it IS factual, must lead one to seriously question the manner in which student boycotts have been portrayed in the existing literature. Firstly, to merely STATE that mass demonstrations were held or debates were arranged (as I did in chapter 3 and as many other writers do) does not tell one much about what occurred during them; neither does one even begin to evaluate what was achieved. Secondly, there

is, I believe, enough here to suggest that revolts of this kind are simply not wonderful things in which the oppressed are united, brave, etc. as they march off into the sunset to claim their freedom. To be sure there are those aspects as well and one would not like to deny their existence or to underplay their importance; but I think the critical approach adopted at the outset with regard to both the subject matter and the sources has been vindicated by the content of much of the empirical material. In the real world most political issues are subject to controversy and struggle; how much more so during times of heightened social crisis? While much of the present literature on boycotts may not suggest it, anybody who participated in these events or who has any experience of life in a political organisation in South Africa (or anywhere else) should know that there is a "struggle within the struggle" and that, like the broad opposition to the status quo, it does not always take on polite or uncontroversial forms. And, as I stated at the beginning, to adopt such a perspective does not necessarily have to entail a denigration of mass revolt or imply that it has to be eschewed; neither does it mean that the broad cause espoused is not worthy in either a moral or any other sense; neither does it in any way detract from the real victories and achievements.

These factors are relevant in that when respondents either praise or condemn aspects of the boycott one must bear in

mind that in as much as this may be indicative of present attitudes, it may equally be indicative of what actually happened.

## 4.6 CONCLUSION

As Straker (1992: 2-3) has written, there is a widely-held belief popularised in the media that the young people involved in the protests during the 1980s were a "Khmer Rouge", "Lord of the Flies" generation whose militancy and revolutionary outlook knows no bounds. In the same way workers are sometimes portrayed as radical by definition. I have tried to paint a picture which shows the contradictory nature of consciousness by examining the group as a whole in relation to the boycott conceived as different kinds of action. Generally speaking one can say that there is a minority which still tends to favour mass action, a minority which tends to oppose it, the majority have a foot in both camps. It was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that this was also the case with most individual respondents in respect of what they had to say during the course of the whole interview.

The findings in this chapter were largely based upon what respondents said about selected and key features of the boycott. It has been my argument that this material is suggestive of what their present views in regard to mass struggle are. This way of discovering interviewees'

present-day outlook is, I think, a valid one because the findings in this chapter are in the main borne out by data differently gathered.

At one point during each interview I directly asked respondents what they now think about the boycott, whether their views had changed since 1985 and, if so, why.

Of the twenty-five interviewees only one respondent was opposed to the boycott; she did not modify her views after I pointed out what could be regarded as positive features. In 1985 she fully supported the protests.

Three were in favour of the boycott; two of them modified their views after I referred to what could be regarded as negative aspects.

The rest were all in favour of the boycott in some ways, but opposed to it in others. Of the twenty-one in this group, six were more in favour of it than against it; eleven were more against it than in favour of it and the rest, four in all, simply pointed out positive and negative aspects.

All of this must be viewed in the context of the discussion on student grievances which the great majority thought were valid. No matter what respondents may or may not think about the boycott, they still think it was right to have

opposed the iniquities in South African society and, in so far as this was what 1985 was all about, almost all of them think there was nothing wrong with it.

Louis XVI always had such difficulty in making up his mind, but he had a good idea what it meant to be an absolute monarch, ruling as he did by the grace of Almighty God and answerable only to Him: "The state? I am the state" and "It is legal because I wish it" - until the enraged sansculottes and others took to the streets of Paris during July 1789. In a different epoch and social milieu, almost 200 years later, we saw how the Minister charged with "Coloured" education, Carter Ebrahim, declared at one stage that he would put an end to this sort of thing where parents, teachers and pupils think they can oppose his decisions - "I have the authority"; on another occasion he declared, "We will not give them an inch". And so on. Implicit in uprisings of this kind is the idea that men and women made the world and thus men and women (and children!) must act to change the world. It follows that it is right to revolt against the reactionary forces who refuse to "give an inch". Despite the myriad of criticisms discussed and the overall shift from being more militant in 1985 to being more conservative now, it seems to me that implied in the material on student grievances especially is the notion that the former student leaders still feel their boycott was justified in this respect. And how can we, too, on this point not agree or learn from them?

An attempt must be made to explain these things: how it is possible that one can be a wife-beater and a Tory and a trade unionist all at the same time. I would like to suggest two main reasons, but first it may be useful, drawing on Burns, to provide a general perspective. Hirst notes that one of the problems of studying student militancy is that the participants themselves hold a variety of different meanings so that "to adopt a value position within that system is to be unable to study the multiplicity of positions of which it is constituted" (1973: 240). Ethnographic methodologies lend themselves to dealing with these problems. Hirst (Ibid: 241) cites Burns as follows:

> The answer lies in the very variety of interpretations itself. What has been happening - among students ... and to society - to give rise to these interpretations and render ALL OF THEM, in some measure, plausible (his emphasis).

The different and often conflicting forms which consciousness assumes has to do with the variety and diversity of social experience. Robin Hallett (1976: 2-3) cites a lengthy newspaper article about life in Soweto. It refers to the crime rate as the highest in the world, to rising anger as a consequence of years of repression, to the fact that in one house a witchdoctor may be tutoring initiates, in another the "coolest jazz" may be heard, while in a third a youth may typically be struggling with

Hegel. One gains the same impression from the diaries of young people compiled by Mtshali (1982): in one extract a boy beats up his girlfriend because she was unfaithful, in another a girl expresses disgust and prejudice at the fact that dirty boys have the nerve to make passes at (presumably clean and better-off) girls, in a third a boy is prepared to fight any comrade who thinks that because he, the diary-writer, attends an elitist school he is not part of the community and its struggles. Reading these extracts gives one a sense of the diversity of everyday life experiences; often rich and harsh (or just plain boring). One of the problems of this thesis is that it has defined experience in narrow political terms and in the specific context of the events of 1985-6, consequently it does not take other influences which have a bearing on people's lives into account. (I discuss this more fully in Chapter 6.) These do not, necessarily, have to be radicalizing influences. It is worth recalling that the Nazis and before them the Italian fascists, succeeded in gaining mass support among significant sections of the working class. Opposition organisations in South Africa have spent a great deal of their time countering state propaganda, a recognition of the possibility that the ideas of the ruling classes can and do take root amongst the disfranchised.

In general, then, one needs to take into account the plurality of oppression arising from a plurality of social

experience in which often conflicting influences or "ideas" are transmitted. How these are articulated in all their diversity in public life is what politics is all about (arguments derived from Mercer, 1990). Whereas in Europe, for instance, this has in recent years found expression in a variety of anti-establishment movements (the Greens, gay, lesbian and feminist organisations); in South Africa, these "other issues" have been subordinated to the twin problems around which struggle has been most acute: national liberation and economic exploitation. This does not, of course, mean and it does not necessarily follow as we have seen, that there are other things also which, for better or worse, determine people's attitudes. All the contradictions in South African society cannot simply be reduced to class or race; neither can they be separated from these. It has been stated so often that racism and patriachy were already prevalent when the industrial revolution occurred. On the other hand, it would be foolish to deny that they did not gain particular characters under capitalism. The main conclusion which has been reached shows that respondent ideology is comprised of a complex articulation of differing and different standpoints, a reflection of different forms of oppression and of competing ideologies. The danger of this eclecticism in political consciousness lies in the fact that it creates space for it to be channelled in any one direction as both left and right compete in the political arena for the "collective will". Like the Roman god,

Janus, it has one face which looks towards the utopian heaven imagined by the Left and another which contemplates the abyss into which the Right will surely lead us. Posed in this way, I may have presented too sharp a dichotomy, but it does help clarify the gist of the argument. Furthermore, to disarticulate and separate the issues means (though not necessarily) organisational disunity, no overall ideological conceptualization of the inter-relatedness of oppression and no overall direction in which to move (adapted from Mercer, 1990). It seems to me that while on the one hand what one should try to think of consciousness as the meshing of opposing attitudes as Mercer argues, on the other hand one should also place these in historically specific contexts which does not rule out the hegemony of particular experiences, and, arising from these, particular ideas. It seems, however, that a problem arises when certain ideas become popular and when a certain populism becomes the order of the day, one tends to ignore other influences which determine opinion. In South Africa the fact that, in contrast to the 1960s, liberatory ideas became current once again in the 1970s has been very deceptive. It simply has not meant that a kind of stereotyped, unadulterated radicalism has emerged. The latter may be there during times of revolt, but as has been stated, not in a pure form. Hybridized political identities may not be very evident during the revolution; they become evident on the day after the revolution, especially when the revolution does not succeed. It is,

ideologically and in so many other ways, in the womb of the old society that the new world struggles to be born.

Lastly, pointing to the existence of, and trying to understand, ideological eclecticism should not be confused with its desirability. One of the very positive features of the 1980s was that (despite the practice at times on the ground and the meanings given to them) ideas and conceptions concerning non-racialism and democracy flourished on an unprecedented scale in civil society. Inconsistency in opinion should be looked at in the context of the attainment of ideological hegemony and the development of a socialist critique of society. In Chapter 7 I develop this argument further in relation to the overall conclusions reached.

The second reason which helps to explain the contradictory nature of student consciousness has to do with the fact that almost all the interviewees have left school and are no longer scholars. Maurice (1981: 4) writes that:

> ... young adolescents, unlike mature adults, have what I might call a raw, unspoilt, or stark sense of justice; an uncompromised and uncompromising sense of right and wrong, and of good and bad, unadulterated by concessions to expediency, and unmodified by special considerations and rationalisations.

Four respondents stated that they were not presently interested in politics. The rest were still interested.

Was this because of participation in the events of 1985? Most said yes, although a few added that previous boycotts also played a role.

Six respondents (24%) were still politically active at the time of the interview. All of these, except one who was involved in the politically non-aligned Anti-Drug Campaign, belonged to ANC-affiliated organisations, although most of them were very critical of the ANC.

Of the eighteen (72%) who did not belong to a political organisation, one stated that he would join if he had the time and another that she would if her boss did not mind. This group included six respondents who had been involved but who had since withdrawn. Of these six, two felt guilty about the fact that they were no longer active and one, although still a member of a youth group, was no longer active because he was in matric.

The most striking thing about the replies I got when I questioned respondents about their present political interest and involvement was that most of them, including those who are still politically active, said that they were still interested in politics and that this interest had originated in 1985, but that they were not interested to the extent of participating in the activities of a political organisation. There has thus been a general movement from being active in the affairs of the SRC and

other organisations to political apathy. I asked Abel, a university student who works in NUSAS, SANSCO and assists with the publication of SASPU, whether he was still interested in politics and he replied, "Oh yeah, for sure". Because of 1985? "Definitely." It affected his "whole way of thinking":

> Whenever I speak of personal experience at meetings I relate to what happened in 1985 even though I've experienced worse things [since then] ...

But Abel was an exception, the following responses were more representative of the group as a whole:

> After I left school, I just drifted away ... I still read about things ... but I'm not really interested [enough] to become involved (Marion).
>
> Look, I feel I've played my part ... when I was at school I played a helluva part and I think some other guy can take over ... (Brian).
>
> It was just an interest at school, not that I am not interested anymore ... I still am, but I was more interested at school (Tania).

The above also helps to explain the more conservative outlook and critical attitude to mass struggle and it is, I believe, in part associated with the fact the these former students leaders are now becoming young adults. When I spoke to them they were, ideologically, in the process of

leaving their militant past, but that past (reinforced perhaps by all that continued to go on around them) still clung to its makers and could not so easily be cast aside. The social position of students is characterised by its temporary, transient nature. Within a few years students at high school and university leave their educational institutions and enter the job market. Organisationally this is always a problem as it is difficult to maintain general coherence and continuity. I would go so far as to say that it has been one of the most important and difficult problems faced by SRCs at high schools and that it has often resulted in their collapse. As Hobsbawm (1973: 261) puts it: "Being young and being a student is the prelude to being adult and earning one's living: it is not a career in itself". Thus unlike the adult organisations which can acquire a defined character as a result of the greater "permanent" nature of the social position of its members, student organisations and movements find this difficult to achieve.

Another point made by Hobsbawm (Ibid: 261-3) is also extremely instructive. He discusses the prospects of student radicalism after graduation and refers to a joke about student activists doing "their compulsory revolutionary service" in the same way they have to do compulsory military service. The gist of his argument is that continued radicalism is dependent upon whether or not the students can be incorporated into the mainstream of

society, can gain, for example, access to stable middle class jobs or whether they will be faced with unemployment and the like; all this being determined by the performance of the economy.

These two points - the contradictory political attitudes stemming from a variety of social experience; the transient social position of the ex-students - I believe go some way to explaining the specificity of the political consciousness surveyed in this chapter. They should be considered in relation to the methodological issues mentioned above - one has to especially bear in mind the social context of the interview as compared with the social context of the rebellion.

Finally, leaving aside the nature of the political consciousness or the reasons for it, I hope that the reader has gained a sense of the richness of the responses and the array of insights into the boycott seen as different forms of action. In the next chapter, I contrast the latter with the poor responses in respect of the boycott perceived as thought.

**NOTES**

1. In this chapter and the ones which follow no grammatical corrections have been made to any of the quotations in which respondents are cited.

## CHAPTER 5

## THE BOYCOTT AS IDEAS

> We tried ... to achieve our goal. We tried to make the students aware but the students themselves [i.e we ourselves] were not aware of what was happening ... like I myself did not even know the correct thing ... I went and stood in front of the class and how could I explain to them when I myself did not know ... I did not understand the struggle ... I ... was aware a little but the others knew nothing of what was going on ... (Avril).

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

I have argued and tried to show in Chapter 3 that the boycott can be seen as a series of events and characteristics (action) which generated ideas with which the participants were confronted. The previous chapter surveyed the different and differing perceptions regarding action. This chapter evaluates ex-student consciousness in terms of their understanding of key ideas thrown up during the course of the boycott. At the end of this chapter and in Chapter 6 I compare and analyse the findings of the two chapters in relation to one another.

### 5.2 THE CONSUMER BOYCOTT

Practically all the respondents (except perhaps three) knew what a consumer boycott entailed but none of them could

give the specific reasons for the 1985 consumer boycott. As Avril put it:

> We wanted to force the government and inform the overseas community about something with the consumer boycott but I don't know what it was all about.

Likewise:

Helen: ... they wanted to cripple them or I think they wanted to, how can I say, I think they wanted to, but I'm sure, but I know they were asked not to go buy there.

EW: Why? Why did they want to cripple them?

Helen: I think it was to, so they could turn to the government. I can't remember. I knew at the time why but don't ask me [now]...

Six respondents complained that local traders put up prices: "They were actually exploiting their own people and it did not make them better than the government", continued Helen. Five respondents referred to the intimidation that was used to force people to support this protest and a few expressed reservations about such campaigns because of the danger of people losing their jobs.

The fact that none of the interviewees could recall the reasons for the consumer boycott can be linked to the fact that seven respondents gave incorrect reasons for this

protest. For instance both James and Ruth thought it was in opposition to low wages, worker exploitation and colour discrimination in the private sector:

> Just the qualification as well of ... certain people where the white or black, if the student was white and he had a certain qualification and the black student had a certain qualification, the same or even a higher one, the white person would still get the job in that company and we just felt that was unfair so we, we gonna boycott these companies (James).

He added (quite incorrectly) that the consumer boycott achieved an increase in wages but that this was not "completely satisfactory". Raymond also confused the general call of 1985 to boycott white shops with a specific boycott of some or other company's products. And Lionel referred to the support big companies in general gave to sponsor racist sport and "promoting Apartheid" as reason for the 1985 consumer boycott.

I often got the feeling that what James and some of the others cited above also seemed to be saying was that no matter what the thing may or may not have been about, it was in opposition to the "government" or "Apartheid" and that makes it a good, worthy cause which should be supported - the fact that one does not quite know or understand what is going on, notwithstanding. I detected a kind of impatience with this line of questioning. The idea seems to be that one's heart has to be in the right place

and that this was more important than other considerations. James appeared to pre-judge campaigns like the consumer boycott: no matter what the opposition did one rejected it, even before they announce their intentions or whatever concessions they feel obliged to make. This was one of the things that tended to inform his outlook; it was linked to an implacable opposition to the status quo.

Ruwayda seemed to think that the idea behind the consumer boycott was to get blacks not to work for whites: "I would say that that was not right because, look, most of our parents work for whites. If they did not work for them there would be no income". Ruwayda tended to imply that with some of these protests we blacks often do stupid things, cutting our noses to spite our faces.

While the foregoing does at least illustrate some kind to implied attitude towards the consumer boycott and did represent (largely failed) attempts at making sense of it, some respondents like Gregory and Louise had very little to say about the consumer boycott:

EW: What was the consumer boycott all about?
Louise: Oo gits, I don't think I can answer you.
EW: How was it promoted in the area? ...
Louise: I don't know.
...
EW: Do you think it achieved anything?

Louise: I don't think so.

EW: Why?

Louise: Because I don't really know much about it.

On the other hand there were four respondents who either elaborated on what the consumer boycott entailed and/or showed some insight into this form of struggle. Mogamat said the consumer boycott focussed on the issue of profit and the high cost of living:

> it made people understand that the reason for certain commodities ... [being sold at] exorbitant prices was not because it was so expensive to manufacture ... but because the shopowner wanted 70% ... profit for himself. [It] made people ... realise, it created a consciousness within them of what capitalism was all about.

It could very well be that Mogamat had learnt all these things during the consumer boycott, but this, as I have tried to show, was definitely not the case with most of the other respondents who at best had a very vague idea of what the issue was all about.

Jane also showed some insight into the campaign as a whole; she stated that a consumer boycott can make shopkeepers realise "that they can't exist without the people" but,

> It must be used ... constructively. It must be organised. You can't just say we gonna

> use a consumer boycott ... You must prepare for it.

And Shanaaz said that to stop traders from unnecessarily increasing prices, a co-ordinating structure has to be established which would monitor and try to prevent price increases.

The statements by Jane and Shanaaz are significant: they are representative of a small group of respondents (roughly 16-20%) who are able to stand back and critically and constructively evaluate the campaigns in which they were involved and helped promote. They are also indicative of independent thought, a refusal to simply toe the popular line, or to regard the history they made through the blinkered prism of hagiography. This feature was noted in the previous chapter as well. It must be stressed that responses such as those of Mogamat, Jane and Shanaaz were exceptional. For most interviewees, such insight into the consumer boycott as there was did not take into account any of the broader questions which were thrown up during the campaign. Without going into detailed discussion, I shall merely refer to the replies made above by respondents like Mogamat and make two or three additional points to illustrate the kind of analyses which were absent from interviewees' responses. One observer remarked at the time that:

> The state can ban organisations and meetings, it can clear the streets and change the date of funerals, it can detain people without trial, and it can even shoot them dead, but it cannot force people to buy if they do not want to (cited by White, 1986: 73).

Clearly, this was one of the key strengths of the consumer boycott. On the negative side, one could point to the exaggerated claims made during the course of this campaign that withholding "black consumer power" would topple the government; or to the class alliance with traders which was forged in the Western Cape during 1985. In regard to the latter, Seekings (1986: 24) writes that one of the things one has to be wary of during consumer boycotts is the relationships cemented between progressive organisations promoting the boycott and the local capitalists whose support is elicited or upon whom pressure is being exerted: "Whilst this means that traders become supportive of progressive positions, it also means that progressive organisations can become more tolerant of the position of traders".

Most respondents struggled on a very elementary level to make sense of the consumer boycott and to recall it; they struggled even more in coming to terms with whatever its wider significance could be said to be.

## 5.3 RE-OPENING OF THE SCHOOLS

This event features prominently in the literature. In Chapter 3 we argued that there were two issues which were raised in regard to the re-opening of the schools: the right of the people to exercise democratic control over education (and any even superficial knowledge of the degree and nature of state control in black schools will make one realise just how vital this issue is); opposition to the tricameral parliament whose Minister had closed the schools. During 1984 intensive campaigns were conducted by all extra-parliamentary organisations in the Western Cape (and, indeed, nationwide) against the elections which were held to implement the tricameral parliament. In fact one could argue that the school boycotts nationally during 1985-6 were, in part, a product of these anti-election struggles.

Twelve respondents either stated that they could not remember the re-opening of the schools, or could only vaguely recall it and/or could recall one or two points in connection with it. It was therefore difficult to get them to say what the incident was all about. In addition to these twelve there was the case of Abel who was in hiding at the time - the police were looking for him. (His brother and parents participated in the protests, though.) And there was the case of Shanaaz who was in Zimbabwe, having fled the country; she could therefore not comment on

the event either. Two other respondents said their parents kept them home that day. Helen was determined to join the protest despite concerted efforts by members of her family to persuade her to stay at home. Her grandmother "was praying the whole night (laughs) ..." On the morning of the fateful day - she overslept!

Like with the consumer boycott many ex-pupils knew little about the re-opening of the schools.

EW: [The government] ... closed the schools and then a number of protest meetings were held all over the Peninsula and a call was made that pupils, parents and teachers re-open the schools. Do you recall the incident?

Simon: Yes.

EW: Do you recall what happened at this school?

Simon: ... [There was] a holiday when they closed the schools.

EW: Yes but look ... Everybody was at home, a whole lot of meetings were held, so it was decided that everyone must go and open the schools.

Simon: I don't know. I was not at meetings or such things. I don't remember.

EW: So you don't know what happened at the school?

Simon: I can't, I remember that the school was closed and then it was opened again. I don't know ... [I noted at the time that he sounded really puzzled and was struggling to place the incident.]

EW: Yes, eventually, but on a certain day people decided that they were all going to protest at the school, they were

simply going to come onto the premises.

Simon: Was there something like that? I can't remember. I can't remember.

As with the consumer boycott, there were respondents who did not understand this event as well. Tania seemed to think that the re-opening of the schools referred to state attempts to victimize and close "our" school. Students succeeded - she vaguely said - in preventing this. At the time of the interview I noted that she did not know anything about the incident at all. "Nobody ever said parents must come to school to re-open them ... None of my [relatives] came here".

As stated above, only very few respondents knew anything about this incident. Four respondents said that up to that point the schools had been centres of resistance; if they were closed no effective protest could take place. "The school was actually the only camouflage through which students' message could be carried to the community", said Raymond. Brian added that the whole action had symbolic significance and that "we knew we weren't going to get it right". For Fatiema the symbolic significance lay in the fact that it was an act of defiance on the part of the community: " ... you tell us you gonna close the schools and we just come and open it ... "

Seven respondents mentioned something to the effect that the schools were, as Mogamat put it, "institutions of people's power". Almost all of these could not explain the concept or gave vague replies.

EW: You say the schools belong to the community, what do you mean by that?

Helen: It belongs to, how can I say? There's not much finance coming to the, to the school from the Department, and if its not for us people there, and I mean I know the community don't give much. I feel that they should give more. They should work, to, to make it a school.

Control over education is seen as the community contributing financially to the running of the schools. It is not seen in terms of parents, teachers and pupils determining what goes on inside the schools in opposition to the control exercised by the various state bureaucracies.

## 5.4 STUDENT GRIEVANCES

I asked students about their grievances and why they had gone on boycott with a view to ascertaining what conception about the nature of South African society they had formed.

The majority responded by listing demands, in much the same way student organisations did during 1985. What struck me about these demands was that no attempt was made to relate

them to one another or to any broader social context. For instance, nobody linked specific shortcomings at school to the educational system in general or to the society in which that educational system operates. It seemed to me that what the respondents were speaking about was how they, on the ground, experienced the various inequalities in South African society. One of the demands most often related - eight interviewees mentioned them - centred around conditions at schools. Shanaaz was one of the few who elaborated at length; she spoke in anger because clearly the issue touched and affected her, the last sentence had an almost heart-rendering ring to it:

> Like for instance the schools, I mean ... why shouldn't we have all the same ... facilities, enough books and decent classrooms and things? Look at the ruling class schools. We didn't have facilities at ... [our school]. We were told to run an 800m [race]. I remember ... there were no lanes. There was nothing whereas not far from us at Zwaanswyk High [a nearby "white" school] they had everything ... most of the time we had to sit two in a desk ... we had to share textbooks.
>
> ... I'll always remember it. I was anaemic when I was at [school] and I had low blood pressure. I used to faint continuously but I had to go and lay on a bed that was in the females' toilet and ... things like that people were opposing ... You find at any other school they have a sick bay ... We had to sit in classrooms where there were no windows. In winter we used to freeze in those places ... There was never proper facilities for us to make use of ...

Most other respondents, unlike Shanaaz and one or two

others who elaborated, provided lists of grievances. I shall list most of them much in the same way in which they were told to me (the number in brackets indicates the number of interviewees who mentioned particular points): to free Nelson Mandela (3); one man, one vote (1); objections to corporal punishment (2); in opposition to "gutter education" (5), to get detainees released (8); to get troops out of the townships (3); in opposition to police action (5); in opposition to the tricameral parliament (1); to get the army out of the townships (3); in protest against the Group Areas Act (4); dismissed teachers had to be reinstated, organisations unbanned and the state of emergency lifted (2); to abolish segregation and Apartheid (2); "Everybody was just sick and tired of the state of oppression" (Raymond). And so on. This was how most respondents understood the protests: implied in this list is a broad opposition to Apartheid. There is very little doubt that when, for example, eight respondents state that one of the reasons for the boycott was to release detainees they meant that it was wrong to have arrested them in the first place. There were about two exceptions to the latter generalization.

Helen: I'm still trying to figure that one out. In '85 I didn't know, honestly, I don't know why they boycotted ... they gave grievances from all kinds of things but it didn't make sense to me and I don't know ... and if I ask the people that was really involved, that really threw stones that really taunted the police, they don't know why they did it; and I mean I

know 'cos I really asked ...

EW: So you don't know why the boycott ...

Helen: I don't know Mr Weber, don't look so funny at me, I'm still trying to find out why (laughs) ...
At the beginning it was said ... it was for solidarity for the people in Uitenhage but [sounding really perplexed] what the people in Uitenhage was boycotting about I don't know ... [then] it got out of hand because everything just came out. We were boycotting for this, we were boycotting for that, we were boycotting for a better education system ... we wanted to get away with the gutter and all that. In the old end I knew it ended up like that but why the thing was started, I don't know ... if it was for a better education system, I don't know if it did anybody good, 'cos there's still ... maybe its changing now. I don't know.

## 5.5 LOCAL POLITICS

This was the least understood aspect of the '85 struggles. Most interviewees - eighteen in all - knew very little about differences amongst political organisations in the Western Cape or even about differences within student organisations like WECSAC. Of this group of eighteen, very few had anything at all to say about local politics. Most said that only very few students were aware of these differences and that the rank and file remained ignorant of them. One stated she was too young at the time and did not really understand: "I was stupid" (Zelda); another that she was still trying to find out (Nawarda). Rafieka

mentioned that she found this aspect "a bit confusing":

> We used to have debates, like SOYA followed a PAC line and the CAYCO people followed ... [the] ANC and they used to have these debates about ... Black Consciousness and stuff like that, all very - what do they call it? - theoretical, I think (laughs).

Differences of opinion amongst political organisations was sometimes important, sometimes not. I have already remarked that there is at present very little in print on this subject with regard to student organisation during 1985, especially the debates around the slogan "Liberation before Education". The question, as stated, also arose in the discussions on the consumer boycott.

> There was a lot of mud-slinging ... There's not much I can remember. But when we used to go to meetings ... you used to find a lot of fighting ... students actually wanted to ... do bodily harm to each other, they actually wanted to fight, like ... at some meetings it was terrible what was going on (Ruth).

Marion expressed surprise on hearing (from me) about differences within student ranks. It looked as though she was hearing this for the first time: "If we are all fighting for the same things, how can there be differences?" James vaguely stated that the main difference was who was going to lead "at the end of this" (implying that differences amongst political organisations were reducible to an undesirable and inexplicable power

struggle). Some organisations were opposed to violence while others were not. Asked to identify the former he replied that students "were not really interested" in them. (It seemed as though he was referring to conservative and not extra-parliamentary organisations.) He further recalled that UDF supporters wanted to prolong the boycott whereas others said that students should return to school because enough of them had been hurt. These differences were not "a main issue", said Helen (and four others agreed):

> [Suddenly there were all these organisations who] wanted to be in the front pages ... within the space of three months there was ... I dunno how much youth organisations ... I didn't know what one to go to ... I didn't want to get involved there because I felt that this was a struggle against the government and why should we go fighting amongst ourselves still? ... I remember sitting down and talking with a few of them that belonged to [She did not mention the name of any organisation], and I just didn't want to get involved, and they were actually upset because I felt it was petty. We should have forget our differences and ... really fight the main issue.

Brian stated that the ANC wanted a violent take-over of the country whereas the PAC believed that one should first educate people militarily, as lawyers, scientists before overthrowing the state. He mentioned that WECTU teachers decided not to have anything to do with the exams but that COSATU (!) disagreed. A "big feud" resulted. (This is totally incorrect.) Asked about differences within student

ranks he replied that the UDF was more popular because it was "mixed", i.e. non-racial. Brian's explanation (and those on one or two others) was exceptional in that most responses to this topic were short; "I don't know" being common:

EW: There were a number of different political organisations in Cape Town during 1985 like the UDF and the Cape Action League and the Unity Movement. These organisations were all opposed to the government but they differed amongst themselves. Can you explain what they differed about?

Rene: No, I can't.

EW: They differed, for example, with regard to the consumer boycott and they also differed as to how long the boycott should last. Do you know anything about that?

Rene: No.

EW: There were different ... student organisations that tried to co-ordinate the boycott in the Western Cape like WECSAC and WECSCO and within those organisations as well there were differences of opinion ... Do you know anything about that at all?

Rene: Nope.

EW: Do you think that students were aware of these differences?

Rene: ... I wasn't aware of these differences and I'm sure I'd have heard if any of the people I moved with were aware of it.

Simon responded in the following general manner - he was unable to clarify:

Their ideas probably differed and so on. Or

> the one wanted this and that one wanted something else ... and the one, he did not want this and then there was conflict among them.

In more or less the same kind of general, vague manner:

> ... say there was one big organisation now everyone belonged to it and some students perhaps belonged to another organisation, that organisation's constitution differed perhaps ... this brought them into conflict with one another (Adiel).

He could not state what they differed about.

A few ex-students (exceptions) did, however, attempt somewhat fuller explanations and, unlike Brian, did not mention blatantly incorrect facts. The kind of responses summarized below - I shall look at two (out of a possible four) - were not representative of all the interviewees. Mogamat listed the following: the UDF had liberals within its ranks whereas CAL and AZAPO would not allow this; with the consumer boycott, the UDF wanted to boycott all white shops whereas CAL preferred a selective boycott; the UDF propagated "Liberation before Education" whereas CAL argued we need education before liberation; the UDF wanted to make the state ungovernable whereas CAL argued if you make the state ungovernable with what are you going to replace it? He saw himself as "neutral" but, because he had friends who belonged to SOYA, he was seen as a SOYA member. He added

that in principle these organisations had one enemy and agreed that the boycott was a good weapon. It was the state which highlighted these differences. For the most part they disagreed over petty matters like where a particular rally should be held and, if you have a Congress speaker on the platform, you must have a CAL speaker as well. He also referred to a reluctance to have meetings in African townships and hinted that the reason for this was an elitism on the part of very many students.

According to Shamiel, the UDF relied heavily on emotion "and they didn't argue their case properly". He cited an example of local co-ordinating meetings where the UDF would propose marches without weighing the pros and cons or looking at the consequences. SOYA supporters would not oppose marches in principle, but the undemocratic decision-making procedures. UDF supporters would, for instance, say, "We have decided that we should march ... tomorrow and that all the schools should ... join us". Once a representative claimed, "If we march then the people who watch TV will also join". This made it difficult to go back to schools to get mandates "so automatically they ... take decisions for you ... Many a time it would happen". He also alleged that the UDF would come to WECSAC meetings with the elected representatives as well as other supporters. With more than 100 schools in the Western Cape it was impossible to know who the elected representatives were and who were not.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

In regard to the re-opening of the schools (which 50% could not recall or recalled very vaguely) and even more so in regard to local politics, the evidence indicates that the majority of SRC members had a very superficial understanding of these events. Even those who did comment upon political differences (72% did not) gave replies which I thought were, on the whole, unsatisfactory and lacked depth. The same basically applies to the consumer boycott, the reasons for which nobody could recall. Furthermore, a recognisable minority of SRC members misunderstood the nature of certain events. For instance, almost 30% gave incorrect reasons for the consumer boycott and 12% did not know what a consumer boycott was. Similarly six respondents said something to the effect that the schools "belonged to the people" yet could not explain further; the one interviewee who tried did not seem to understand the concept.

The overall impression gained (as the above has tried to show) was as Gregory hesitantly admitted when I asked him how the consumer boycott was propagated in the area:

> Gregory: No, for, for, the consumer boycott for me, was perhaps something difficult, not something difficult, for me it was perhaps difficult to understand ... I always had questions which I asked ... I always perhaps found it difficult to ...

EW: Understand things properly?

Gregory: Understand things, yes.

A characteristic of the material generally is the unevenness of the quality of the responses. There was a small group of about four or five respondents who were very perceptive as well as a small group, also of about three or four, who understood very little. This appears to be related to personal capabilities and, interestingly, the degree of political commitment and involvement in struggle.

The data and conclusions contained in this chapter should be compared with those in the previous chapter. A distinction should be made between two different kinds of "experience": the material suggests that in respect of those events in which respondents were directly involved - SRC meetings, rallies, awareness programmes - they were able to comment upon liberally, to evaluate, to criticise, to defend. But those aspects which did not really affect them at grassroots level - the re-opening of the schools, the consumer boycott, differences amongst political organisations - they knew very little about and hence did not, and still do not, really understand. These aspects of the boycott were not as integral a part of the boycott experience for THEM (and from their vantage point at the time) as the countless, daily SRC meetings, or the on-going violence or the scores of rallies, etc. This explains why,

when I referred to rallies and awareness programmes, for example, all respondents knew what I was talking about, but when I referred to differences amongst political organisations very many said they knew little about them. As Tania (and three others) stated in this regard:

> ... I don't know ... it is difficult or me to say what they differed about because ... I was never in [such] meetings. I never had contact with outside political groups.

Similarly, a large number did not know much about the re-opening of the schools as well because, I think, at that point one would only have heard about it if one had attended any of the mass meetings held during that week, or had read the pamphlets distributed, or had been at school. Very few pupils or parents demonstrated at our school on that day. The boycott, to repeat, was NOT the same for everyone. There was a significant number of pupils who stayed at home; as one person said, when rallies were held a large number - 60% according to him - went home.[1]

This conclusion is, moreover, borne out when one looks at some of the other data as well. For example, very few respondents attended any of the mass meetings called by adult political organisations. (These were normally held at night.) And, likewise, few of them - surprisingly - knew about prominent events which took place in other parts of the Peninsula - the Trojan Horse incident, the killing

of Ebrahim Carelse, the detention of all the pupils at Zeekoevlei high school. Those who did recall these events tended to recall them vaguely and had difficulty remembering. And, only four respondents went on the Pollsmoor march.

Again when one looks, for instance, at some of the insights regarding the consumer boycott, these were linked primarily to immediate, local circumstances and not to the broader goals or debates which occurred in the forums of the organisation which was co-ordinating the campaign in the Western Cape or elsewhere. The same argument, I said, was applicable to student grievances.

It is in this context that lapses in memory have to be viewed: they featured significantly in this section of the interviews because the topics discussed, unlike those of the previous chapter, were just not that important to the interviewees' experiences.

One can therefore say that the degree of political consciousness and sophistication in political understanding is linked to the immediacy of social experience, that, the more people "felt" and acted, the better they "thought". Put another way, the fact that respondents did not fully understand things like the consumer boycott, can be seen as reinforcing the view that there IS a connection between practice and the theory it produces.

It has already been mentioned that one of the features of the discussion I had with respondents regarding student grievances was that these were seen as lists of demands - release of detainees, opposition to police brutality, opposition to Apartheid in general, etc. - similar to those made from time to time by student organisations. As was argued above, there was, with few exceptions, little indication that this catalogue of demands was viewed in relation to a wider social context, that there was any conception of how the world beyond the immediate confines of the school and the location could possibly function. It will also be recalled that the most commonly stated grievance concerned - significantly - the physical conditions at grassroots level (the lack of proper facilities, dilapidated school buildings, etc.). This shortcoming in understanding is particularly relevant when placed in the context of how, now and historically, different black political organisations have conceptualized the nature of South African society, in particular, how they have viewed the relationship between race, nation and class. Put another way, is the struggle in South Africa about freedom from colonial (racial) oppression (and hence for the attainment of political rights for all) or is it about putting an end to economic exploitation (and hence the overthrow of the capitalist system)? How do the two questions inter-relate? Should they, especially when one takes the history of the country into account, be separated? Formulated abstractly in this way, the issue

has an intellectual, academic ring about it. Yet, its relevance derives from the fact that:

a) it has had practical consequences. For instance, Marx (1992: ch 1) has shown how debates over this question have contributed to the split in the broad liberatory movement in South Africa, have resulted in the adoption of different strategies and have had consequences at grassroots level for political action. More perceptively, he has shown how, in the aftermath of the 1976 uprising, within the Black Consciousness Movement, different tendencies approached these problems and how the hegemony of Congress emerged as the main political opposition nationally (Ibid: ch 3). Bundy, too, in a paper read in 1988 establishes the same connection between the interplay of revolutionary theory and strategy: he "looks at a highly theoretical notion [of the ANC/SACP alliance] - 'Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) - and asks what have been its implications for practice. What relationship (if any) was there between the theory of CST and the form of struggle adopted?" (1988: 2).

b) it determines the direction in which the struggle moves and thus determines what could be called its "final" outcome. Below Cyril Ramaphosa talks about the well-known ANC-SACP idea of a two-stage revolution:

> what prevents [our dealing with] economic transformation [now] is our having to deal with the eradication of apartheid [first].

> For that we need a massive mobilization different from the mobilization for [full] liberation. First we need to use instruments, such as the Freedom Charter, to mobilize and encourage people to continue struggling for immediate demands. Such a short term program gives people incentive. Later we can conscientize and educate people toward greater class consciousness (cited Marx 1992: 127).

It is not my intention to discuss the issues raised in any detail or to review the extensive literature on it; I merely wish to show how the question of the two-stage revolution is relevant to the findings regarding political consciousness reached in this chapter. Martin Legassick (1985: 589) has summed the position with which I am in agreement; he writes that the goal of struggle in South Africa is "to secure a government capable of removing the burdens of poverty wages and starvation, lack of jobs and homes ... etc. that are imposed by apartheid and capitalism together". The view put forward by Cyril Ramaphosa will in my view result in a neo-colonial settlement where, like in the rest of Africa, formal political independence is attained while economic exploitation persists. Far from advancing the eradication of the old oppressive social relations, the latter becomes entrenched in new ways. White Rhodesian farmers were fond of calling their prime minister "good old Smithy"; when the Lancaster House agreement was reached they, realising that the more things had changed, the more they had remained the same, took to

calling Mugabe "good old Bob" (cited in A Astrow, 1983: 163).

If respondents did not fully understand some of the key events and ideas thrown up during the course of the boycott, they understood even less about broader issues concerning the nature of South African society and how, in relation to these, different political organisations drafted different programmes, agendas and courses of action. This meant not only ignorance regarding the strategies put forward by different political organisations but, more importantly, also ignorance in regard to where the struggle was heading. The latter derives its crucial importance from the fact that it determines the quality of the lives of the very participants whose militancy and sacrifice made opposition possible in the first place. Thus it becomes possible for the leadership to determine the fate of the struggle. The practice of democracy pre-supposes understanding of what is at stake; this applies not only to deciding which form of political action is best in given circumstances (see a above) but also what the liberated society of the future will look like (see b above). I shall return to this issue in Chapter 7 when the overall conclusions of this study are placed in the context the struggle for socialism.

I found the disjunction in consciousness in respect of perceptions regarding action as contrasted with those

regarding thought interesting from the point of view of the manner in which I arrived at "insight" in the course of this research. One example (I could cite many others as well) from my research experience is instructive and probably applies to most academic work. At the end of Chapter 3 I tried in brief to spell out what the rest of the thesis looked like. The reason, partly, was to give the reader an idea of what was to follow. Equally, if not more important, was that I wanted self-clarification as to how to interpret the data. I cited Marx in Chapter 2 (section 2.4) where he draws a distinction between how data is collected and how it is presented in analytical form. I tried to follow this procedure and really struggled: it entailed summarizing all the empirical material, looking for patterns, writing this up and then - repeatedly - re-writing Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (and completely leaving out two others) in the form of an over-arching analysis (see 6.3 below) which, moreover, had to be linked to the previous chapters. All very messy; nothing was self-evident until after it was all done. This whole process and the conclusions arrived at were achieved "in the head" and were, presumably, inextricably linked to the reading I had done and my own "prejudiced thought" in ways that I was for the most part unaware. For example, as I was analysing what interviewees had said I sometimes found myself comparing this with my own impressions and experiences of 1985. For the most part my route to interpreting and trying to make sense of the empirical data

during the course of writing the thesis was in stark contrast to the manner in which the respondents reached their insights and conclusions. Theirs had primarily been forged during heat of battle in which the key element was what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the psychological context in which learning took place. That context was not detached or analytical and there was little room for re-shaping, it was, on the contrary, intensely sensuous, spontaneous and emotional (see Kiernan's discussion on Gramsci, 1972: 5-6). As mentioned in Chapter 2 these things are normally shunned in the academic world. I found it ironical that the topic that was being investigated ("Learning through experience") and some of the conclusions reached (the more immediate the issues were to their own experience, the better respondents learnt), had been arrived at in the abstract, intellectual manner I have described. On the other hand, as is probably evident from the style of writing in some places or from the content of what is said in Chapter 7, it cannot be said that my analysis has been entirely disinterested.

In the next chapter I discuss a few methodological questions which are relevant and then analyse as a whole the political consciousness reviewed in this chapter and the previous one by forwarding explanations for it.

**NOTES**

1. Looking at the literature it would be fair to say that we know at least something about the activists but very little about those who withdrew.

# CHAPTER 6

# THEORY AND PRACTICE: UNDERSTANDING RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I analyse the relationship between theory and practice as follows:

a) Methodologically, I ask what conclusions can be drawn from the interaction between some of the assumptions with which I approached the research on the one hand, and, on the other hand, what was suggested by experiences during the research process and the attempts made ethnographically to allow the empirical material to speak for itself.

b) If the findings in Chapter 4 are compared with the findings in Chapter 5, how can one define the specificity of the political consciousness of the former student leaders? And, having defined it, how can one explain and account for it?

Reference is also made to the ways in which the methodological discussion in (a) above could influence some of the overall and key conclusions made in (b).

## 6.2 WHAT I EXPECTED TO FIND vs WHAT THE INTERVIEWING YIELDED

In Appendix A I argued that during the boycott I had formed the impression that the SRC consisted of a small minority of individuals who, partly because of their personal capabilities and partly because of the situation of intense struggle and revolt into which they had willy-nilly been thrown, were politically sophisticated and had a good grasp of the issues at stake, and a majority whose political understanding and general commitment were poor. The aim was to evaluate the group as a whole and to explore the interstices of this unevenness in consciousness.

It took roughly nine months to prepare for the interviews with the former students. During that time one of my main concerns was whether or not the research would work, whether or not the project was at all feasible. The reason for this was that I feared that, for the most part, the interviews would fail and not generate enough material. I had visions of those blank stares and silences which as a teacher I so often got in response to the questions I had asked disinterested and bored pupils. I thought that it would have been far better if I had so conceptualized the research that I stuck to the written documents and extracted all the relevant information from them and them alone. What would happen if respondents simply answered "yes" or "no", or by and large gave one-sentence replies?

As it turned out I need not have worried; it was difficult to process and write up the empirical data because of its volume.

It is, of course, not just a question of volume. At another level people not only had a lot to say but they spoke very well indeed, so often with passion and keen interest and this despite the rather common place questions asked mostly in a neutral, bland tone. (I kept on thinking about the complaints I had heard over the years from colleagues who teach languages regarding the difficulty they had in getting pupils to say anything about anything during the oral lessons or exams. During the boycotts many other teachers mentioned this as well.) The Bourbons, we are told, learnt nothing from history. By far the greatest surprise was to have discovered that with the exception of, I would say two or three at the most, the great majority of SRC members "learnt" much and learnt well as a result of their participation in the events of 1985. I say this despite the fact that I often did not agree with what they had learnt and with the opinions they expressed. If one were to compare what students in "normal circumstances" learn in DEC schools with the array of insights, comments, evaluations, etc. that these respondents have assimilated, then it is in no way comparable - all the more so given the fact that these were largely spontaneous, off the cuff replies given during the course of one and a half to two hours. I am convinced that if five years after the event I

were to ask some of my former history students what happened during Stalin's Five Year Plans and what they thought of it, they would think the very question absurd, would suspect some kind of joke and would not be able to answer anyway. And what applies to Stalin's Five Year Plans probably applies to the Amoeba and Euclid's geometry as well. One is reminded of a pamphlet which appeared during the 1976 uprising which declared, "Education is in itself good, but the first school of an oppressed people is a revolution" (cited in Brooks & Brickhill, 1980: 66). The "revolution" has proved to be far more educational than the institutions conceived by Verwoerd.

I set out, I said, to examine consciousness critically. Yet - and its extent really surprised me - this was precisely what the respondents did: they themselves evaluated their own actions, more often than not, in a critical light. I wish to briefly discuss this not from the point of view that it may be an indication of respondents having become more conservative since '85, but from the angle of the original research design. Because of the confined parameters of this particular research, one cannot conclude that this critical outlook is in any way automatic; that "doing" automatically produces critical thought in the way Thompson (1978: 8-9) seems to imply. Possibly an equally feasible explanation, as has already been stated in Chapter 4, is that there is/was much to criticise about the boycott itself. I have argued that by

getting respondents to speak about the events of the revolt this not only tells us what took place, but how those events are perceived today. What I failed to appreciate before I started, and what is now suggested by the empirical material, is that BOTH aspects are equally important. I mistakenly concentrated on the one and ignored the other almost entirely. Thus I did not try, as a historian would have attempted, to state "what actually happened", to weigh up different kinds of evidence and then draw conclusions; to try, for instance, to find out what "really" occurred at rallies and then to view present day perceptions in terms of this. Such an approach could throw light on why some aspects of the boycott (eg APs) were viewed more critically than others and why for the majority of interviewees, the boycott is presently viewed as a simultaneously positive and a negative experience. These matters are clearly and directly relevant to the major themes of this investigation. They cannot be solved absolutely, in a positivist manner. Nevertheless, I do now realise that their complete neglect was a mistake.

Had it not been for the use of ethnographic methods - allowing the evidence to speak for itself, trying, above all, to discover respondents' meanings and so on - it is doubtful that I would have changed my views in respect of what I expected to find and the conclusions the empirical evidence at various points throughout the thesis forced me make. This means that in a sense the justification for

interviewing former SRC members only as outlined in Appendix A is not valid because the question now posed is whether or not there is any difference in the political consciousness of ex-SRC members on the one hand, and former students who were not represented on the SRC on the other. Of course among the SRC members interviewed there were some who understood better than others - what was surprising was the discovery that so many of them knew so much and had so much to say.

These, then, are the main results which flow from the dialogue between my own prior expectations and presuppositions and the data collected using ethnographic methods. This research has been as much concerned with the latter as it has with discovering the opinions of the ex-SRC members.

I must stress that the above represent my overall impressions in relation to my original expectations; I shall in a moment try to come to some assessment of the material discussed in the last two chapters. A glance at the topics covered in the guide question used in Appendix B will make the reader realise that there was much material which was gathered but not used in the thesis.

## 6.3 ASPECTS WHICH HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED

I have to consider the fact that the material used was

collected by means of interviews which were based on particular aspects of what had occurred during the boycott. As can be seen in Appendix C, there could very well be other aspects which are important and which could have been fruitfully explored. This, as was mentioned in Appendix C, is part of a bigger problem: how narrowly or broadly one defines "experience". In this thesis "experience" has been defined as what occurred during 1985, as the cumulative effect, five years later, of the events outlined in Chapter 3. Yet, obviously, there are a whole host of other "factors" which could, legitimately, be said to constitute "experience" and which could account for people's opinions. Apart from the issues discussed in Appendix C and those raised by the method of sampling (i.e. the assumption that the SRC was homogeneous) one thinks, for instance, about general historical factors - continuity in the form and content of resistance (see, for example, Hyslop, 1986b), feminist concerns, the social, political and economic backdrop against which the uprising occurred, or religious beliefs or even the influence of - advertisements! During the discussion on his present political beliefs, Lionel presented me with his vision of a "better" and more "united" South Africa where so-called race would not matter. His choice of words came very close to a beer advertisement which, at the time, often appeared on cinema and television screens. I have no way of determining the relative importance of matters such as these which have been excluded. I therefore cannot say how

they may or may not alter my conclusions.

This problem should not only be viewed as "factors" which one "adds" to analysis. More substantively, it must be related to how in Chapter 4 I argued (after Mercer, 1990) that diversity in attitude and opinion must be conceptualized as the expression and articulation of a plurality of forms of oppression and a multiplicity of competing ideas. This means that it was incorrect to hypothesize a link between thought and political action in 1985 only. Such a link clearly exists but it meshes with a host of others, including, it seems, the effects of things like advertisements on television.

In a sense this is a practical as well as a theoretical concern. The very choice of a particular topic (or aspects thereof) entails sampling from a greater universe and implies making some kind of value judgement as one excludes some things but not others. Similarly, I have more or less implied that the opinions recorded in the thesis are static in the sense that I have not shown them as capable of change over time and in the light of other, subsequent, "non-boycott" experiences. Marx adopts a sensible approach to this kind of problem; he writes in the Grundrisse that, "All of these fixed suppositions themselves become fluid in the further course of development. But only by holding them fast at the beginning is their development possible without confounding everything" (1973: 817).

While on the one hand as many "relevant facts" as possible should be collected using the best methods that can practically be implemented, ultimately it is the nature of the questions asked and generated which is important. Otherwise, one would merely be gathering information and equating social analysis with an encyclopaedic compilation. A distinction ought to be made between simply adding more evidence and adding facts which enable us to review all the work that has already been done in a new light.

It should also be pointed out that the use of ethnographic methodology and the various attempts I made to come to terms with the problem of bias all lend themselves to generating not only unexpected and new insights, but also lend themselves to isolating defects in the original conceptualization of the research and its design. This is what justifies its use in the first place.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

The fact that important issues have been excluded and that there are at least one or two key defects in the original research design make this a preliminary study. No doubt the reader can make other criticisms also. If I were to reconstruct the methodology again now there is at least one further adjustment commonly used in ethnography which could be made: testing the main findings more rigorously by systematically searching for evidence to disprove them.

Two other kinds of triangulation suggested by Hammersley (1979a: 158-9) are relevant: "investigator triangulation" which involves using different researchers assuming different roles and "method triangulation" - the comparison of data gathered using different methods.[1] It is also well worth pondering upon the following:

> Pressures to publish - and to produce NEW and NOVEL conceptualizations - encourage premature closure of investigation. And our social-science culture provides too few rewards for patient hesitation, recycling, and replication of research. Instead of hearing applause, the anthropologist often hears a scornful 'That's already been done by ---, ten years ago' (Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 286, their emphasis).

All this notwithstanding, how to sum up the main conclusions in respect of the material discussed? I shall now analyse the nature of respondent consciousness in relation to the conclusions reached in the last two chapters. Explanations for the specificity of the latter are sought in viewing of the boycott as a form of youth-based anarchism.

Key aspects of the political consciousness of the great majority of former SRC members can be explained as a result of their involvement in the 1985 boycott. Most of them view the uprising and thus mass struggle generally, from a hybrid of different and conflicting perspectives. There has been a general shift from being more militant in 1985

to being more conservative now; from being actively involved in the SRC towards political apathy. It must, however, be remembered - although this does not fundamentally alter the foregoing conclusions - that those who appear to be politically apathetic or reactionary now may very well think and behave very differently in changed social conditions. Mercer's (1990) arguments regarding inconsistency in opinion do not preclude either radical or reactionary political action; the analysis by Mercer sought to explain how it was possible for revolutionaries to, for example, think conservatively while acting militantly and vice versa. Also, while many respondents may be critical of mass struggle, they still think the boycott was justified in so far as it represented opposition to Apartheid. (It was not surprising either to still find widespread condemnation of state policies and general scepticism about its reforms and the "change of heart" it keeps on alleging it has undergone.)

The boycott's strength lay in its participants' militancy and their selfless preparedness to act. This gave rise to new objective conditions as the balance of forces favoured now the rulers; now the ruled. Events which stand out, like the march on Pollsmoor prison or the re-opening of the schools were only made possible and could only enter the collective mind and so become conceivable, because of all that had preceded them. It was in the eye of this storm that the aspects of respondents' political consciousness

which I have described was forged. But, as Callinicos and Rogers (1978) keep on saying, courage, good intentions and, one may add, the positive results which flow from them, are just not enough. So what can one say about the nature of this consciousness produced by participation in mass struggle? What can one say about the quality and depth of the thought produced by "doing"?

As stated above, the consciousness surveyed was a function of the extent to which it was immediate to respondents' experience. This is both good and bad. Good, in that one cannot envisage how else the array of comments and "political lessons" discussed especially in chapter 4 - irrespective of what one might think of them - could otherwise have been assimilated on a big scale and, moreover, five years later have left such vivid traces. Bad, in the sense that it is precisely here that one can locate the boycott's principal weakness: the political consciousness described is limited and flawed because it fails to take into account a wider social context. Hence there is widespread ignorance regarding key aspects of the boycott and key events which occurred during the boycott. And hence the world is viewed from a commonsense point of view, in respect of how it seems and not in the way it actually functions or in respect of what makes it tick. Bundy (1989: 216-7) comes to more or less a similar assessment; see also Mafeje (1978: 22-4). WIP (1980a: 73-4), however, does not:

> ... the 80s have witnessed the growth of student understanding of the dynamics of capitalist exploitation, and apartheid's role in it. The students of the Western Cape had noted that equal education is useless in a society based on exploitation. A clear attempt is made to situate their demands in a wider context (WIP, 1980a: 73).

Three extracts are quoted in support of this argument. I shall cite all of them because it has been my contention that for the great majority of respondents (except, perhaps two or three) anything approximating the perspectives advanced by WIP has been absent in their political outlook:

> We must see how ... short term demands are linked up with the political and economic system of this country. We must see how the fail-pass rate in schools is linked up with the labour supply for the capitalist system ...
>
> Our parents, the workers, are strong. They have power. We, the students, cannot shake the government in the same way ... We have got to link up our struggle with the struggle of the black workers. Our parents have got to understand that we will not be 'educated' and 'trained' to become slaves in apartheid-capitalist society ... (T)ogether with our parents (we) must try to work out a new future. A future where there will be no racism or exploitation, no apartheid, no inequality of class or sex.
>
> The two functions of education have been thoroughly discussed by students. The one is ideological control by the state. The second one is to prepare us for a specific labour market (cited Ibid: 73-4).

The above extracts are not referenced; they sound as though

they were culled from pamphlets or similar publications. If this is the case then one must remember that very often such publications were not written by high school pupils but by adult activists. Writing about a different situation but nevertheless relevant to South Africa, Hirst (1973: 225) remarks that student literature should be treated with caution: "this literature is often GIVEN to militant students (his emphasis)".

Having defined the thinking of the former student leaders in relation to the conclusions reached in Chapter 4 as compared with those in chapter 5, how do we account for their political outlook?

There must have been very few, if any, serious observers who would have predicted that the regime headed by the likes of the National Party would, in February 1990, unban political organisations, lift the state of emergency and proceed to contemplate what it had always regarded as unthinkable: enter into negotiations on "power sharing" - even majority rule - with the resisters it had hounded so mercilessly and for so long. Analysis and prediction based upon reason indicated trends in the opposite direction and there appeared to be ample evidence to support it. Marx thought - and his life's work informed this view - that revolution would occur in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. Shortly before February 1917 Lenin applied his mind to the situation in Russia and, with his feet firmly

on the ground, concluded that there would be no real change in his lifetime. No doubt one could find other examples where careful, reasoned thinking (from whatever point of view) has proved to be utterly wrong - in the light of reality and of practice. What does that say about our faith in reason? About the pride with which classical marxists traced their ancestry to the "Age of Reason" (also called the "Enlightenment") which preceded and "paved the way" for 1789? It will be recalled that Marx never denied his intellectual debt to Hegel who was a product of eighteenth century rationalism and the French revolution. So much for "theory". Perhaps there ARE more things between heaven and earth than is generally accepted. One could, of course, turn the argument on its head as it were and state that the issue is not whether one is wrong but to recognise it and act accordingly. For political organisations to perform such feats are easier said than done. Be that as it may, what concerns us are the pros and cons of anarchism because it is this social phenomenon which, more than anything else, is based upon voluntarism, instinct and spontaneity, and a rejection of words over deeds.

I have argued that in one sense "reason" was absent from the political consciousness of former SRC members but that in another it was there. How is this possible? The answer, I believe, lies in coming to some understanding of the nature of the '85 rebellion. Hobsbawm's reflections on

anarchism are very helpful and I would like them to be borne in mind when the reader looks at the next chapter. He writes that on the night of 9 May 1968 many left-wing groups opposed the setting up of barricades in Paris because the police had been instructed to fire upon the protesters and the the result would have been, so they argued, a senseless massacre. "Those who went ahead were the anarchists, the anarchizers, the situationnistes ... "; their actions led to the "greatest general strike in living memory" (1973: 87). He goes on to state that "the limits of anarchism become evident within a few days, even in Paris" and points to the failure of guerrilla movements in Latin America as an example that it is not enough to simply engage the enemy. Nevertheless, he states that one of the weaknesses of classical marxists was that "they tend to think of revolutions occurring under conditions which can be specified in advance ... at least in outline, foreseen, planned and organised". This has not been the case in practice.

> Like the surfer the revolutionary does not create the waves on which he rides, but balances on them. Unlike the surfer - and here serious revolutionary theory diverges from anarchist practice - sooner or later he stops riding the wave and must control its direction and movement (Ibid: 89).

During the period of struggle I have been discussing, in the squatter camp, Crossroads, a fourteen year old boy called himself "Comrade I-will-Die" and stated that "It

means I am a brave comrade. I am brave in the struggle. I fight for our people. I say I-Will-Die-We-Will-Live. There are many of us and we want to fight for freedom, and some we die, but we know the people will live. This apartheid it is going" (cited by Johnson in Johnson, 1988: 122).

Conceive of the boycott as a form of anarchism, as a Chiron more "beast" than "man", and then my conclusions in regard to the political consciousness of the respondents do not appear to be contradictory. I believe that this perspective can be applied to the whole period of resistance ushered in by 1976 provided one looks at it from the point of view of the grassroots level and not from the angle of the leadership of mass organisations. (This last qualification is important because if one were to review the struggles over tactics and principle within COSATU during the 1980s, for instance, or between the different ideological tendencies within the liberatory movement from the perspective of what was going on at the top, one would probably come to the opposite conclusion.)

In the light of Hobsbawm's analysis, it is therefore not fortuitous at all that the insight that was there was insight which came from the boycott perceived as action, not insight from the boycott as epitomizing thought. Thus the former student leaders interviewed can, ideologically, be regarded as children of the kind of rebellion in which

they participated.

Why was this so? Why was the boycott more "beast" than "man"? The anarchic character of the 1985 uprising has to be placed in a broad socio-economic, historical and educational context. Below I couple discussion of the latter with references to the social position of the youth and to demographic factors. All of this explains how and why youth-based opposition, characterised almost by definition by a willingness to act, feel and experience rather than a willingness to discuss and quietly reflect, emerged in the mid-1970s and 1980s. The anarchic nature of the rebellion cannot be separated from the fact that it was youth-based.

On 9 January 1973, workers at Coronation Tile and Brick went on a strike that spread to other parts of Durban. It is commonly accepted that this development, the rebirth of the black trade union movement, together with the rise of the Black Conscious Movement and developments in Southern Africa (like the independence of Mozambique and Angola) heralded the beginning of a new era of resistance in South Africa in the aftermath of the repression of the 1960s. The rapid economic growth after Sharpeville led to the embourgeoisement of National Party and the faithful it was in the habit of patronizing. Partly in consequence, the government embarked upon piecemeal and half-hearted "reforms" whose consequences it could not and did not

foresee; instead of solving problems, it compounded them. Two brief examples will suffice. The introduction of a new constitution in 1984 was meant to co-opt "Coloureds" and "Indians"; instead there was a massive campaign which led to a boycott of the tricameral parliament by the majority of those who had bothered to register as voters. Likewise, in 1983 thirty-four black local authorities saw the light of day; by 1984 there were meant to be 104. As a result of the nationwide revolt which had introduced dynamics of its own into the national situation by April 1985 there were only three still functioning (Cobbett, et al in Frankel, et al, 1988: 32). Open resistance once more came to the fore (1970s) and grew (1980s) at precisely the time when the economy faltered and, save for very short booms, experienced continued "negative growth" (see Coker in Johnson, 1988; Lodge in Lodge & Nasson et al, 1991: 30-2). Detailed analysis of this period and its socio-economic and political context has been discussed by virtually every writer of recent South African history. Perhaps the most useful perspectives are the various interpretations which, very aptly, have applied Gramsci's idea of an "organic crisis" permeating every the fabric of society, to the South Africa of the mid-1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Saul & Gelb, 1986). For our purpose it is suffice to say that youth-based opposition grew in the fertile ground of a new period of opposition to the entire, crisis-ridden system of Apartheid. In fact it was often the young who spearheaded that opposition. The annual 250 000

school-leavers could not get jobs and the cost of living rose steadily as the already low standards of living in the townships declined even further. Education had provided prospects of a better future at a time when the economy could not deliver the goods and unemployment increased. Besides, the black educational system was and is notorious for high failure rates. Hobsbawm (1973: 248) tells us that, "Becoming a revolutionary implies not only a measure of despair, but also some hope". And there was much about which to despair - and hope in the South Africa of the past two decades.

To all this must be added the long history of opposition to white supremacy in general and Bantu education in particular. Hirson (1979), Molteno (1983, see Part I) and Hyslop (1987b) have suggested that 1976 and after be viewed not as a break with the past, but as a CONTINUATION of past struggles in schools which pre-date the introduction of Bantu education. Often the latter has been ignored and it is worth exploring the linkages and discontinuities with the past in far more detail than has hitherto been the case.

In as much as it would be a mistake to ignore broad historical and socio-economic analyses in discussing the student revolt, it would be equally incorrect not to view it in specifically educational and generational terms. It is important to state that BOTH these explanations assist

in understanding what went on (see Bundy, 1989). Student boycotts were not exclusively about young people uniting and struggling about youth issues; they were ALSO overtly political movements in opposition to a particular political system. In fact ever since 1976 student organisations have made concerted attempts to link their struggles with those of workers and such attempts have more often than not been accompanied by a recognition (in theory at least if not in practice) of the primacy of the worker struggle.

In the early 1970s the government of John Vorster adopted a new policy in respect of black schooling. Capital needed trained workers so the government decided to expand black secondary schooling (Marks & Trapido in Johnson, 1988: 22). In 1965 there were 66 568 blacks in secondary schools, in 1970 this figure rose to 122 489, in 1975 to 318 568, in 1980 to 577 584, in 1984 to 1 001 249 (Ibid). There were two consequences, the second of which is often ignored:

a) This dramatic increase in the numbers of young people at school placed tremendous strains on educational institutions: poor teaching, overcrowded classrooms, double sessions, lack of funds for equipment, inadequate buildings, deliberate debasement of educational and academic standards as official policy - the long, familiar list of shortcomings provided the tinder for the revolts of the 1970s and 1980s.

b) Together with the physical features of what constituted gutter education went educational alienation:

> This alienation can be observed in almost any school one cares to observe - and is identifiable at the one extreme of violence ... but perhaps even more alarmingly in the pervasive boredom that dominates the lives of children in school ... If education is primarily a form of social control, surely they have the right to react, and perhaps even violently, to this attempt to dehumanise them. Any situation in which knowledge is mystified; any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of free inquiry is one of violence. Much of what passes for education throughout the world can be seen in just such a light (Kallaway, 1976: 10).

Kallaway has placed the idea of educational alienation in an international context. In modern South Africa this has, of course, occurred in the context of the impact of twenty to thirty years of segregated schooling. Without going into detail, it is enough to note that it is, to put it mildly, singularly unpleasant to find oneself day in and day out in a Std 9 classroom doing mathematics with the accompanying, endless tests, homework, examinations, etc, without ever having made sense of the Std 6 syllabus. In 1976 black students were suddenly faced with having to study subjects like Geography and Science in Afrikaans - a language in which neither they nor their teachers were competent. Students reacted by, among other things, setting fire to schools. This neglected question - the specific form educational alienation has assumed under

Bantu Education - needs further examination and, unlike the way in which I have posed it, more rigorous analysis. In this regard the work of Lazarus (1983) is pertinent. She mentions a whole list of factors like streaming, authoritarianism in the classroom, Bantu education, corporal punishment, indoctrination, etc. from the school experience of the students she worked with which contributed to feelings of alienation and estrangement. Two factors negated these effects: participation in boycotts: "The sense of unity experienced, the awareness raising which occurred, and the discovery of the positive effects of their protests all contributed to the development of a sense of power and community"; and participation in an alternative educational programme which included features such as a "democratic `shared-power' structure ... communication skills training; exposure to different world news and views; participatory and experience-based teaching methods; and encouragement of critical thinking and a questioning mind" (Ibid: 168; see Chapter 5).

Against the above general socio-economic, political, historical and educational backdrop, one should take into account the social position of students (and the arguments outlined in the conclusion to Chapter 4 which I shall not repeat):

> [We] have few economic restrictions. Often

> [youths] don't have a family to take care of. They have nothing to gain, hence they are always politically active. [And] the youth are receptive to ideas ... This makes us a more conscious sector of the community ... and more militant ... The youth can take ideas and exploit them and use them, whatever the implications (Youth leader, cited in Johnson, 1988: 96).

The particular position students occupy in society therefore means that it is easier for them to think and act radically than, say workers, whose jobs and income determine virtually their entire existence. Hirst says that students should, socially, be seen as part of an intelligentsia. He has, I think, university students in mind. However, the points he makes are not entirely unapplicable to South African high school students. He writes that, "In so far as the student is relatively free from the constraints that result from a definite set of occupational demands and interests; he is relatively free to think and act: he can be more politically committed because he is less socially committed". Hirst goes on to note that such intelligentsias have, historically, been attracted to radicalism and refers to the Russian intellectuals during the nineteenth century (1973: 244).

When the whole preceding discussion is further placed in a demographic context the fact of youth-based resistance and well as some of its principal forms no longer appear surprising. In 1986 it was estimated that half of the

South African population was under the age of twenty-one and more than forty percent of Africans were under the age of fifteen (Johnson, 1988: 95-6). Moller (1967: 237) states that the young become politically active during times of rapid demographic growth. While he recognises that not all historically crucial movements are predominantly led by the young, he does discuss a number of them in terms of the demographic factor. For instance, he writes (Ibid: 241) that during the nineteenth century most European countries' populations grew. The Italian nationalist Mazzini was acutely aware of the advantages to be had in recruiting the youth whose praises he sang. The organisation he led, Young Italy, excluded members who were older than forty. Similarly, during the 1960s, writes Moller (Ibid: 245) most of the civil rights activists in the United States were under thirty. Moller quite rightly points out that age "constitutes only one determinant in the functioning of society" (Ibid) so that, although important, it has to be analysed in terms of historically specific situations. In the same way the existence of poverty, or membership of the working class, or participation in a boycott five years ago does not automatically guarantee militancy and a "progressive" outlook. In the light of the fact that in Chapter 4 we found that amongst most former student leaders there was no hegemonic ideological tendency, save a shift to the right, it is instructive to briefly discuss the recent history of Indonesia to which Moller refers (Ibid: 247-8). He says

that it has been characterised by "successive waves of revolutionary youth". In 1965-6, after the defeat of the Communists by the army, the government of Sukarno attempted to break the power of the military, college and high school students revolted. They brought the government to its knees and then took to the streets "with the approval and admiration of their families". With the help of soldiers, they killed half a million Communists or persons thought to be Communist. While there is, at present, nothing to suggest that the swing to the right by the respondents interviewed will result in anything as extreme as the Indonesian experience, citing this example does help to emphasise the fact that winning the hearts and minds of the former student leaders now and in the immediate future is very much a contested affair.

The relevance and importance of the "demographic factor" lies in the political action and outlook which accompanies it. Bundy talks about a "generational consciousness" and discusses "generational explanations for youth-based resistance" (1985: 304-8). He writes that in the South African context, since 1976, a "generational unit" has come to the fore in which " ... a self-aware age-group sought generational unity, disbanded themselves from their parents, and spoke for 'we', the youth of South Africa" (Ibid: 310). Part of the reason for this concerns the fact that the social and political circumstances under which the 1976 generation grew up differed markedly from that of

their parents. Their parents, for example, were still reeling under the impact of the repression which followed Sharpeville; the 1976 generation could not relate to these (demoralising) experiences. Similarly, their parents could often not understand their actions as they watched from the sidelines. The general crisis in South African society fuelled student militancy as the events which expressed it deepened the crisis and hardened attitudes. The political consciousness which came to the fore was, because it was youth-based, characterised by "precocity and immaturity" (Bundy, 1987: 318).

This kind of youth-based consciousness was cemented by the fact that the UDF, the main liberatory organisation, propagated a populist form of struggle. The organisation was comprised of a broad alliance of left-wing, liberal and, predominantly, nationalist tendencies. On the one hand it was able to muster mass opposition, to intervene nationally, to change, qualitatively, the national situation; on the other hand, it contained within its ranks a variety of ideological standpoints and, therefore, accommodated numerous forms of struggle. Its ideological eclecticism was a function of a defined theoretical position: acceptance of the two-stage theory of revolution. The consequence for political practice on the ground was to propagate different forms of extra-parliamentary opposition irrespective of ideological content. In common with the Mensheviks, the Economists

and, initially, the Bolsheviks in Russia, the argument was that because opposition was not aimed at the immediate overthrow of capitalism, there was no need for "theory", especially socialist theory, in the content of the form of opposition (see pp 247-8 below). As long as the student struggle was extra-parliamentary and militant, it had to be encouraged. Different tendencies within the UDF alliance could give the boycott any meaning they chose: the nationalists, for example, could see it as a means to pressure the state into a negotiated settlement as a so-called "solution" to the problems which beset the country; while some of the radicals could view it as giving rise to a developing situation which would further their revolutionary agendas. The political practice of the UDF (whether it formally flowed from the two-stage theory or not) furthered the cause of (inter alia) youth-based anarchism.

If my findings as outlined in this section are valid, what meaning can be given to them? What is their contemporary political significance? The final chapter tries to answer these questions.

**NOTES**

1. Originally, after all the individual interviews had been completed, I had intended getting all the respondents together in groups of about four with the intention of

presenting the research findings to them and asking for their comment. The idea was to actively encourage debate around evidence from their experience which would disprove my conclusions. I wanted to incorporate this material into the thesis. The final conclusions would have been my own. Unfortunately for a number of practical reasons this was not possible. I still, however, hope to contact all the respondents again and individually discuss the conclusions with them.

## CHAPTER 7

## LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE AND SOCIALIST CHANGE

> We do not face the world in doctrinaire fashion, declaring, `Here is the truth, kneel here!' ... We do not tell the world, `Cease your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the true watchword of the struggle'. We merely show the world why it actually struggles; and consciousness is something the world MUST acquire even if it does not want to (Marx to Ruge, September 1843).

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The boycott was an act of revolt against Apartheid and all it had come to mean for the class of 1985. Therein we have said lay both its strength and its weakness. Whatever the case, never before in South Africa's history had the sanguine hopes of liberation stirred the hearts and minds of so many into such prolonged action; never before had the state acted so ruthlessly to crush all resistance, to weed out the communist it was sure lurked behind every township bush. In the process it, like Macbeth, became "far" "stepped in blood"; except that unlike Macbeth and unlike other fascist regimes in this case it was mostly the blood of the nation's children. For that we must never forgive them and, more especially, the system they were defending. These were heady days; events followed one another with

breath-taking speed. For the majority the general situation had become utterly intolerable. The battle-cry "Liberation or Death - Victory is Certain!" summed up not only a euphoric mood but the kinds of actions which people on a mass scale actually embarked upon. It therefore seems singularly inappropriate to study such an event, from whatever angle, as though it only has academic interest and without alluding to its contemporary political significance. An attempt is therefore made below to place the main findings of the previous chapter in the context of the struggle for socialism.

I started off in Chapter 1 by showing how a number of writers viewed the relationship between theory and practice from different perspectives: Marx's historical materialism, for instance, postulated a connection between the socio-economic base of a particular society and the ideologies current in that society; while Shakespeare's Hamlet had to make up his mind whether he was going to continue to suffer mental anguish or whether he was going to ACT in order to resolve his dilemma. This discussion, together with the analysis of the boycott events to which I shall refer presently, made me ask: what have been the effects of participation in the 1985-6 boycott on the present thinking of the former students? A review of the literature on student boycotts suggested a critical approach to mass struggle and the analysis thereof.

In Chapter 2 I argued that this interplay between action and thought was one of the most common problems with which social scientists have to grapple. There is always a contradiction between the world as it actually is and attempts made to make sense of it and to interpret it. The topic chosen for analysis could also, therefore, be examined methodologically as the interaction between the researcher's biases and the data he/she collects. Because the very same issues lie at the heart of both ethnography and marxism which, in Chapter 2, were shown not to be incompatible, I decided to use ethnographic interviewing as method to collect the empirical material.

In order to demonstrate that an abstract idea had not arbitrarily been imposed on what occurred during the boycott in an idealist manner and in contradiction to the notion common to marxism and ethnography that the starting point of any analysis is reality and the concrete, I showed in Chapter 3 that the same dialectic which had formed the subject of my inquiry was central to both the essence and the sequence of the events as they unfolded during 1985-6.

Chapters 1 to 3 clearly demonstrate the INTERRELATIONSHIP and UNITY of the opposites which constituted the topic of investigation. This is evident on many levels. I shall not summarise all the arguments. Suffice to repeat that, methodologically, I could not compartmentalize my own experiences and involvement and the literature I had read,

from the analysis of the data I had gathered. The attempts made to do this were not entirely without value. They, for example, enabled me to come to conclusions I originally did not expect to arrive at and they also alerted me to defects in the research design. In brief, theory and practice form ONE, albeit contradictory whole.

What emerged from the analyses of the empirical evidence, however, was both a unity and a disjunction of theory and practice. As stated, respondents understood and could evaluate the events in which they directly participated, not the wider social issues which were highlighted, nor the ideas produced during the course of their actions. In Chapter 6 (see 6.4), I tried to explain why this was so; in the rest of this chapter I argue that the contemporary political significance of the research findings lie in seeking ways in which the disjunction in consciousness can be overcome. Furthermore, in Chapter 1 I referred to the tendency on the part of some writers to romanticize and to treat popular struggle and ideology (because they are generated by the under classes) as though they are beyond critical evaluation. In this chapter I wish to show in what sense the conclusions in respect of the political consciousness of the former student leaders discussed in Chapter 6 should be critically analysed. These problems are not new; they were intensely debated at the beginning of this century amongst European social democrats. I shall briefly examine what Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg had to say on

this topic because their views clash, demonstrating opposite ends of a spectrum of ideological positions. The main focus, however, is on Gramsci, because his theory of organic intellectuals, as I show below, epitomizes the UNITY of theory and practice. The discussion below starts with brief references to the sense in which this issue is central to marxism, yet Marx himself discussed it only in a general and theoretical manner. (The reason for this is probably because, unlike Lenin or Luxemburg, for instance, the question never arose for him practically. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, Marx withdrew from active participation in politics and did not belong to a political party.)

## 7.2 TOWARDS THE UNITY OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

It is commonly accepted that in marxian epistemology there is a difference between "appearance" and "essence" and that it is this which provides the raison d'etre for social science (see Geras, 1972). A medical doctor examining a patient relies mainly, one supposes, upon medical science to make a diagnosis and prescribe appropriate treatment; he/she does not, primarily, proceed in a subjective manner, from the basis of how things "appear". Thus Lucio Colletti (1972: see especially 376-7) argues that marxism as science cannot be separated from marxism as political consciousness which the working class has to acquire in order to emancipate society. Marx's critique of, for example, the

"fetishist" nature of commodities entails drawing a distinction between actual social relations under capitalism and how they are perceived by people. Social realities can be de-historicized by being regarded as part of the natural order of things; the real nature of exploitation becomes hidden from workers (after Geras, 1972: 286, 295, 298). Hence in the preface to the first French edition of Capital, Marx (1976: 104) says he " ... applaud(s) ... the idea of publishing the translation of Capital as a serial. In this form the book will be more accessible to the working class, a consideration which to me outweighs everything else". Lastly, the notion of a socialist mode of production means - if it means anything at all - bringing order, reason and "consciousness" to the manner in which people make a living.

Jane made much the same point when she criticised the boycott by saying she felt that students were too preoccupied with local grievances and events and did not have a wider, more national perspective. This is what she said the boycott had taught her:

> ... it made me realise that, number one, before you really confront people [i.e. do political work], you've got to make sure what you believe in ... You can't just suck things out of your thumb ... You must know what you are against, you must know what the system in South Africa is about ...

In a nutshell, there is a difference - a vital one -

between the political consciousness which arises from the lived experience of everyday life and struggle and SOCIALIST consciousness. How to combine the two?

Marx did not systematically develop a theory of the proletariat. He did, however, following from historical materialism, connect the revolutionary character and consciousness of the proletariat to its objective place in real life under capitalism. In the Holy Family, he writes:

> It is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the proletariat as a whole may for the moment imagine to be the aim. It is a question of what the proletariat actually is and what it is compelled to do historically as a result of this being. The aim and historical character of the proletariat are laid down, irrevocably and obviously in its own situation in life and in the whole organisation of bourgeois society (cited by Sweezy, 1972: 149).

It is in regard to acquiring a revolutionary consciousness that Marx's writing is limited. The question which Marx never SPECIFICALLY asks or SYSTEMATICALLY answers is whether or not worker consciousness is born spontaneously as a result of its objective, socio-economic place in society. In one instance Marx refers to the role of the proletariat as follows: "We must force these petrified [socio-economic] relationships to dance by playing their tune to them" (cited by Kolakowski vol. 2, 1978: 397). The "relationships", it appears, cannot automatically do so on their own - someone or something must do it for them.

Lenin stressed the vanguard role of the party in bringing socialist consciousness to the working class; he writes:

> We have said that THERE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN Social-Democratic [i.e marxist] consciousness amongst the workers. The history of all countries shows that the working class exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers ... etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historic and economic theories elaborated by the representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social Democracy arose altogether independently of the working class movement, it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary intelligentsia (1947: 31-2; his emphasis).

Hence:

> ... we must make it our concern TO DIRECT the thoughts of those who are dissatisfied ... WE must take upon ourselves the task of organizing an all round political struggle under the leadership of OUR Party (Ibid: 85; his emphasis; see also Lenin cited by Fischer & Marek, 1972: 30).

Luxemburg, on the other hand, stressed the virtues of spontaneous political action: consciousness would arise in the act of revolt. This interpretation of Luxemburg is often linked to her economic writing as outlined in her Accumulation of Capital, where, using a critique of Marx's reproduction models in Captital, vol 2, she tried to show under which specific conditions capitalism would inevitably collapse (see Sweezy, 1970: 202-4; McLellan, 1979: 50-2).

This would, crudely put, lead to spontaneous worker uprisings and revolution (see Boggs, 1976: 66-7; Magri, 1970: 108). The revolution, for Luxemburg, is not made by a vanguard party; it arises spontaneously out of the advanced, crisis-ridden development of the forces of production which is accompanied by revolts and a consciousness transformation. Hence the need for action and the importance of the mass strike (see Luxemburg in Howard, 1971: 223-270).[1] In the end the imminent collapse of capitalism proved to be illusory and the German proletariat's "spontaneous" militant action and street politics dissipated into division and defeat (McLellan, 1979: 55).

Below I argue that Gramsci's theory of organic intellectuals provides a theoretical starting point to bridging the divide between Lenin and Luxemburg and the divide between the political consciousness which arises from political action and socialist consciousness.

As many have pointed out, Gramsci's unique contribution to marxism lies in his elevation and theorization of the political. In this endeavour he was simultaneously also redefining the link between theory and practice (see especially Merrington, 1968). This meant demonstrating, in regard to historical materialism, the CHANGING, RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP between the "base" and the "superstructure" and, further, to show the decisive influence the latter can have upon the former. Indeed, so many of Gramsci's key

concepts illustrate the impact of social relations upon the sphere of production; for him the latter never exists in a pure, economic form.

Gramsci defined intellectuals broadly but denied the existence of intellectuals as a separate social group independent of class. "ALL men [and women?] are philosophers" (Gramsci, 1971: 323) and "All men are intellectuals" because they have intellects which they use, "but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (Ibid: 9). As a group intellectuals can be divided into "traditional", professional thinkers who normally see themselves as independent of the ruling class and whom every ruling class tries to win over and, more importantly, "organic intellectuals". The latter are defined less by the jobs they do than their social function in directing class aspirations (see Ibid: 5-23). In the same way that the capitalists need organic intellectuals, i.e. technicians, civil servants, journalists, etc.; the working class needs its own organic intellectuals who should not merely analyse society but who, in working class organisations and through the struggles waged by those organisations, come to experience the language, idiom and culture of the proletariat (Ibid: 418).

> The new mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical [political life], as constructor,

organiser, `permanent persuader' (Ibid: 10).

Political action in its broad spontaneist sense cannot be separated from a conscious awareness of it; separated that is from its essence, aims or direction. Kolakowski (1978, vol. 3: 234) writes that according to Gramsci "we do not know social processes by `observing' them from outside ... Cognition is an `aspect' or `expression' of social development, on the same footing as economic changes". Hence one finds in the article "The Revolution against Das Kapital", Gramsci arguing that the significance of the 1917 revolution lay in the fact that the Bolsheviks "live the thought of Marx" (cited by Hoare and Smith in their Introduction to Gramsci, 1971: XXXi), because they made a socialist revolution in backward Russia where, according to orthodox, "theoretical" marxism, it was not supposed to occur. Gramsci affirmed, in other words, the a priori, "spontaneous" act, over theory - the deed was more important than the word. Like Luxemburg (in Howard, 1971: 286-8; 290-2), Gramsci (as well as the Mensheviks, Plekhanov and Trotsky - Carr, 1966: ch 2; Deutscher, 1954: 79-97) did not agree with the Leninist tenets (as outlined in What is to be done?) regarding the role of the vanguard party in bringing socialist consciousness to the labour movement, "from outside". He wanted to democratise the leaders-party-led relation and to build a mass movement rooted in the "collective will", not a core of professional

revolutionaries. With reference to the Italian situation in the 1920s, he wrote:

> Any participation of the masses in the activity and internal life of the party, other than on big occasions and following a formal decree from the centre, has been seen as a danger to unity and centralism. The party has not been seen as a result of a dialectical process in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organising and directing will of the centre converge; it has been seen as merely something ... which the masses will join when the situation is right ... or when the party centre decides to initiate an offensive ... (cited by Hoare and Smith in their Introduction to Gramsci, 1971: LXii; see also Gramsci, 1968: 42-5, 51-6).

Participatory democracy lies at the heart of much of Gramsci's analyses.[2] (See for example, his idea of a "passive revolution" - Gramsci, 1971: 104-120; Bates, 1975: 353-4; and his views on the workers' councils during the "red years" of 1919-20 when massive strikes hit Turin - Gramsci, 1968 especially; Gramsci, 1971: 161; Kolakowski, vol. 3 1978: 247; McLellan, 1979: 177-8; Simon, 1982: 82-5.)

It should not from the foregoing be assumed that Gramsci shared Luxemburg's faith in mass spontaneity and intuitive self-activity. Implicit in the idea of organic intellectuals is the UNITY of theory and practice; the role envisaged for the organic intellectuals of the working class is to mediate between the two and to link them

together. As Gwyn Williams (1960: 592) puts it, "The popular element 'feels' but does not always understand or know; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular 'feel'". What Gramsci calls the "active man-in-the-mass" is not as a result of "practical activity" able to formulate a radical critique of the world or able to change it (Femia, 1975: 33-4). He says " ... the existence of objective conditions ... is not yet sufficient: it is necessary to 'know' them, and know how to use them. And to want to use them" (cited in Femia, 1975: 37). "Knowing" and "feeling" must be brought into dialectical relationship with one another via the organic intellectuals of the working class. Hence in as much as Gramsci stressed the "voluntarist" and spontaneist aspect of rebellion politics, he equally stressed the necessity of the conscious, intellectual component:

> A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent without ... organising itself and there is no organisation without intellectuals ... without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a stratum of people 'specialized' in the conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas ... (cited by Vacca in Sassoon, 1982: 50).

He argues further (very much like Lenin) that working class consciousness is primitive or "economic-corporate" if the unorganised and spontaneous elements predominate (see Gramsci, 1971: 334-5). Noting that labour is subject to

many ideological tendencies or "wills" - "a communist will, a maximalist will, a liberal democratic will ... even a fascist will" (cited in Boggs, 1976: 7; Cf my findings and Mercer's, 1990 argument in Chapter 4) - he states that "no theory" means leaving the field open and uncontested to any one of these. The bourgeoisie created a "historic bloc", i.e. it gained economic and ideological ascendancy through alliances with other classes and through "civil society" and its institutions like the school, the family and the church. Once in power it maintains this "hegemony" by consent and persuasion mediated through civil society, and by the force of the state. Williams (1960: 587) has usefully defined Gramsci's concept of hegemony as follows:

> an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society, in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all tastes, morality, customs, religions and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations.

Revolutionary change consists in breaking down the political, economic AND ideological-cultural elements of bourgeois hegemony (i.e the bourgeois historic bloc) which tends to dampen class conflict and replace it with passive consent. In its place a socialist, counter-hegemonic alternative must be built.[3] This entails transcending the workers' immediate, uncritical and often contradictory world-view. Gramsci drew a distinction between

revolutionary strategy in the East (i.e. Russia) and Western Europe. In the backward East where the all powerful state was everything a "war of manoeuvre", i.e. a frontal attack by the opposition was necessary. In the West, however, where a well-developed civil society existed, a "war of position" which required trench warfare between more or less equally strong enemies, was necessary. A "war of position" means the breakdown of the bourgeoisie's ideological and cultural sway and influence over the working class (McLellan, 1979: 186; Simon, 1982: 74-5). In all this the role of the organic intellectuals is, of course, central.

Boggs says Gramsci regarded revolution "as a PROCESS not an event (or series of events)" (1976: 17; his emphasis). The whole idea and intention is - and this is the main point upon which so much hinges - to create what Togliatti called "a collective intellectual" (cited in Simon, 1982: 99), or as Sassoon (1982: 38) puts it, a "new organisation of knowledge" of the working class. In this way the division between mental and manual labour, between leaders, led, party, class and mass is broken down. Word and deed must be made one:

> ... is it the intention that there should be rulers and ruled, or is the objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary? In other words, is the initial premise the perpetual division of the human race, or the belief that this division is only an historical fact,

> corresponding to certain conditions?
> (Gramsci, 1971: 144).

As said, Gramsci stands ideologically midway between Lenin and Luxemburg (after Boggs, 1976: 69, 83). If Lenin can be said to have extolled the virtues of the Party in bringing socialist consciousness to the labour movement, and if Luxemburg can be said to have argued that socialist consciousness is borne spontaneously in the act of revolt, then Gramsci's theory of organic intellectuals, the preceding discussion has tried to show, represents, as he himself puts it, a "unity between spontaneity and conscious direction" (cited in Femia, 1975: 41).

These notes have attempted to demonstrate how the topic I have been discussing has broader concerns and what its political relevance may be. The purpose has been to suggest in very schematic and general terms how the gap between "spontaneity and conscious direction" may be overcome. While the discussion has focussed largely on Gramsci, I have stated that others tended with different emphases to view matters differently. The whole problem is further complicated (and it is absolutely vital that this is recognised) in that writers often had their own particular political situations and "conjunctures" in mind when formulating their positions. It is furthermore tied up with other crucial debates both of which I have already

touched upon. (For example, in Russia at the turn of the century there were two important concerns which were linked to this subject - I simply mention these because to discuss them is way beyond the scope of these notes:

a) The question of democracy, i.e. the relationship between the Communist leaders, their party, its supporters and the mass of the population is pertinent in regard to the rise of Stalinism and its recent collapse. In 1903 Lenin's narrow and restrictive qualifications for party membership and the role it was to play in the revolution as outlined in What is to be done? came under heavy fire and led to the Bolshevik-Menshevik split (see Carr, 1966: ch 1; Deutscher, 1954: 79-97). In the months following the split a bitter feud ensued. Plekhanov accused Lenin of "confusing the dictatorship OF the proletariat with the dictatorship OVER the proletariat" (cited in Carr, 1966: 44, emphasis added). Similarly Trotsky, who sided with the Mensheviks, argued as follows:

> Lenin's methods lead to this: the party organisation [the caucus] at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally a single "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee ... The Party must seek the guarantee of its stability in its own base, in an active and self-reliant proletariat, and not in its top caucus ... (cited in Deutscher, 1954: 90).[4]

b) Also relevant is the question of the

bourgeois-democratic or socialist nature of the coming revolution: simply put, the idea being that opposition which was spontaneous meant that bourgeois change would occur whereas opposition which was seeped in socialist ideology paved the way for not just any change, but for SOCIALIST change).[5]

What Tom Nairn has to say about the British working class has much relevance to present-day South Africa. He writes that the English working class was born "in conditions of the utmost violence"; consequently it was forced "to rebel in order to live" (1972: 187). But why, he asks, did it come to embrace reformism, why did it not rise to power? The question is important because the contemporary socialist movement in Britain is confronted with problems which have their roots in this transformation of the English proletariat during the 1840s (Ibid: 188). His answer, briefly, is that the British working class came to reject reason and embrace a bourgeois world-view which, during the 19th century, was cast in an anti-intellectual, empiricist mould (Ibid: 200).

> Consciousness, theory, an intellectual grasp of social reality ... [are crucial to] the socialist transformation of society ... the [English] working class ... [failed to become] what the bourgeoisie had never been ... a class dominated by reason (Ibid: 200).

Nairn concludes that more than 100 years later it still

lacks theory, consciousness and reason (Ibid: 205-206) and that if any of the major European industrial working classes had triumphed, fascism, Stalinism and the imperialist exploitation of the Third World, could have been obviated (Ibid: 199).

Admittedly the conclusions derived from the empirical material require further, more rigorous testing. If they are valid, then the mass struggles of the kind of 1985-6 must be repeated - and made better. Even if it is true that (at present, in any case) MOST of the dramatis personae of this period are no longer as concerned with social issues as they once were, then it is still possible to stand on their shoulders and what they achieved - to see further so that we may act better - and vice versa. Next time, perhaps, the pace setters should be the former students who have become mature workers and, as a result of having learnt from experience, have assimilated the lessons of 1985-6. When Freire talks about breaking the "culture of silence" among the poor, it must be achieved in a manner which neither romanticizes nor discards all that is spontaneous or innate - social being must be united with socialist consciousness; "the idea must press towards reality". We must in our lifetime create the conditions in which this can be attained. And the struggle must continue.

**NOTES**

1. Geras (1973) has strongly attacked such a reading of Luxemburg.

2. Hughes, however, writes that, "As happened so often in Gramsci's writings, a totalitarian thought is clothed in a liberal guise" (cited by Williams, 1960: 586). Others have interpreted Gramsci's concept of hegemony as authoritarian and anti-democratic following, possibly, Togliatti who linked it to Lenin's conception of the Party and the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" which the Russian communists (Lenin, Axelrod, Plekhanov) used in their debate with, and in opposition to, the Economists. (See Bates, 1975: 352, 358-60; Femia, 1975: 40-2; Williams, 1960.)

3. For a sympathetic, perceptive critique of Gramsci from a Trotskyite perspective, see Anderson (1976-7). Anderson criticises, inter alia, Gramsci's stress on the attainment of the proletarian cultural hegemony and what he regards as Gramsci's neglect of the coercive role of the state. The political implications are, as always, interesting: "... once bourgeois power in the West is primarily attributed to cultural hegemony, the acquisition of this hegemony would mean effective assumption by the working class ... without the seizure and transformation of State power, a painless transition to socialism ... " (1976-7: 46). He goes on to note (correctly) that Gramsci himself never drew this

conclusion (see also 1976-7: 27-9 and his conclusion at the end of the article). It is interesting to note in the light of Anderson's critique, the general reformist tenor of Simon's (1982) interpretation of Gramsci.

4. Lenin's views on democracy and the role of the party cannot be culled from What is to be Done? alone as I (like many others) have tended to imply. The latter work should be compared with his State and Revolution. It is also worth emphasizing that in practice the Bolshevik Party attained a remarkable degree of democracy both before it gained power while it functioned clandestinely, and more particularly after it had won power. Only after Stalin assumed control (not without a drawn out struggle) did the situation change. Nevertheless, even if one takes all of this into account, I still think Trotsky's critique of Lenin is valid. As a prediction it turned out to be prophetic.

5. The question of the "bourgeois-democratic" or socialist nature of the South African revolution has long been debated within the broad liberatory movement. This is not the place to discuss this issue, except to point out its relevance to the general discussion. (See pp 196-8; 228-9 above.)

**APPENDIX A**

**INTERVIEWING**

> ... most ethnographers find it necessary to provide some kind of account of their research for the reader ... [these] often seem to have a dash of rhetorical self-justification about them. You must bear this in mind when you read such accounts (Hammersley, 1979b: 32).

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this Appendix is to spell out some of the more technical questions concerning the methodology (as opposed to the theoretical aspects discussed in Chapter 2). I look at problems concerning ethnographic interviews, what occurred in the field, how the arguments presented in Chapter 2 were applied in practice, which decisions were made regarding the research design, and the type of sampling used.

**HOW EX-PUPILS MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE PERCEIVED ME**

It is widely held that questioning people is "one of the most effective way(s)" of obtaining their opinions. It is equally widely held that the main disadvantage of this technique is that it lends itself to respondent and researcher bias (UCT School of Librarianship, n.d. 7).

I noted two general responses when I first visited all the potential interviewees. In many cases ex-pupils, especially those whom I had taught, were pleased to see me. I often felt like continuing with a social conversation and would gladly have done so had I not been painfully aware of the many house visits still to be made. The second general response was that I often got the impression that people agreed to be interviewed because to have refused may have seemed impolite. They, in other words, felt obliged to co-operate. In both cases, a possible danger was that, when the time came to conduct the interviews, I would not distance myself enough by rigorously pursuing what could easily have been seen as sensitive issues for fear that this may endanger friendly relations. On the positive side, the big advantage of being known to the respondents was that I easily gained access to them as well as a measure of trust which I very much doubt an outsider or stranger would have been able to achieve. My own role in the boycott also seemed relevant at this stage of the research. I was perceived (so I thought and would like to think) as a "political teacher" who was opposed to the status quo - by no means an exceptional phenomenon given the times in which we live. It therefore occurred to me that ex-pupils, whether they were now conservative or not, would (probably unconsciously and unintentionally) want to give me the impression when we talk about the boycott that they too are/were opposed to the system. They, being polite, friendly, co-operative persons wanting to help the

researcher who is known to them, may want to give responses which they think I want (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 98-9; and Miller in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 87-9).

In addition, we all have a conscious or unconscious view of ourselves and this tends to influence the image of ourselves we present to the outside world. Verbal statements to researchers are no doubt influenced by this (Pelto & Pelto 1978: 74).

I structured the interviews in such a way so that these issues as well as the general problem of researcher bias would be addressed. (See also the introduction to Chapter 4.)

**OTHER PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERVIEWS**

A host of other problems are usually linked to interviews: the place where they are held, whether or not a tape recorder was used, the mannerisms of the interviewer, the absence or degree of rapport, whether or not questions were clearly understood or thought to be embarrassing, etc. Such factors (as well as others - see Dean & Whyte in McCall & Simmons, 1969 and McCall, Ibid: 128-9) can, singly or together, distort the data collected. Much depends upon the personalities of those involved. Pelto & Pelto (1978: 73-4) write that "It has been frequently noted that different interviewers can elicit different kinds of

answers from the same informants". The reason, obviously, is that the different researchers hold different opinions, look for different things, and subtly bring to their interviews all kinds of biases about which they may or may not be aware.

None of these problems can be solved completely or absolutely in the research design. Being aware of them helps and part of the solution at the outset seemed to be to record what actually happened in the field. The following - the first check more so than the second - were broadly borne in mind when analysing the data:

> The traditional check in the evaluation of any datum in participant observation studies is to inquire whether the account seems plausible. Does it hold up internally and make any sense in the light of one's broad understanding of human behaviour? ... A second important check is to assess the stability of the account to determine whether it is consistent with other accounts from the same source (McCall in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 130).

There are problems with the above. I found that often what seemed to me to be "plausible" in the light of my "broad understanding of human behaviour", proved to be incorrect. This applied to both what I expected the conclusions to be like (see Chapter 6, 6.2) and to possible problems I anticipated in regard to the interviews before they were conducted (see below).

**WHAT OCCURRED DURING THE INTERVIEWS**

Before I started the interviews I was very conscious and concerned about the issues discussed above because I had not done this sort of thing before and because it appeared that one had to be on the look-out for so many different things simultaneously (see, for instance, Kadushin, 1990: 124-5; Appendix, Ibid.). To a very large degree interviewing is a skill one becomes better at the more one does it. All in all, a daunting task, I thought (nervously). Yet none of this turned out to be problematical. The impression I gained with every interview - and I hope I am not mistaken or that I did not miss anything - was that I had obtained an honest and frank account of respondents' opinions in regard to the questions asked. (Cf. "Impressions can be thoroughly wrong; so can the statements of informants" Colson, cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 79). To be sure "honesty" and "frankness" are not problem-free concepts in interviewing as Dean and Whyte (in McCall & Simmons, 1969) have perceptively shown. Yet I think that whatever, for instance, respondents may or may not have thought of me, or whatever subconscious opinions I had of them, really did not seem to matter fundamentally to the end result. Spradley (1980: 55-6) says that one of the problems beginner ethnographers face is that they have to cultivate what he calls "explicit awareness", i.e. they have to notice things which most people, the novice included, take for granted. There is,

generally speaking, a difference between what ordinary commuters in a train see and what a participant observer studying them sees. I shall stick to my impressions, but at the same time acknowledge that I could have fallen prey to mistaking that there was "not much ... going on" when, in fact there was (see Ibid: 70-1).

Some interviewees referred to me as "Sir" or "Meneer". I do not attach any particular significance to this except in one case (Adiel) where I really felt like a teacher questioning a pupil and where I sensed that the respondent felt obliged to answer in much the same way that pupils often feel obliged - in that reluctant kind of way - to do whatever their parents or teachers instruct them to do.

As far as I can tell, there was only one case where a respondent (Mogamat) saw that I was deliberately playing Devil's Advocate and that I did not really believe in what I was saying. He had just told me that he thought the boycott was basically good. I then referred to all the pupils who were forced to leave school, all those who had been shot and killed, etc. with a view to discovering how he would react to these commonly held opposing opinions. As I was speaking, he laughed as if to say, "Come on, you're not serious. You can't possibly believe this stuff about violence. I know what you're up to". At that point I tried in vain to suppress a smile.

In two or three cases I did notice a slight nervousness and hesitancy at the beginning, but this soon disappeared. (A possible explanation concerns the nature of the first question - see the discussion at the end of Appendix B.) There was at least one exception: Gregory seemed ill at ease on a number of occasions during the interview. He appeared to have difficulty in understanding some of the questions and complained a few times that he found it difficult to answer on the spur of the moment. I sympathised with him; had I been in his shoes, I probably would have felt the same - trying to provide cogent answers and explanations in so short a space of time.

There were a few (literally about three or four) instances at certain points during particular interviews when I got the impression that people were not so much giving a reply but were speaking to the tape recorder because they wanted to put certain things on record.

I was somewhat impatient a few times, especially when I felt people were drifting and/or not answering the question. On the whole though, I really enjoyed conducting all the interviews despite the fact that they were very time-consuming. I often arrived exhausted at people's homes but the tiredness soon disappeared once the interview got under way.

There were two instances (Marion and Louise) where a crying

baby proved to be distracting. In the case of Marion's interview this did not last very long; in the case of Louise's interview it lasted for quite a while. The discussion continued, questions were asked and answered and there appeared to be very little one could do but press on.

In most cases - there were exceptions - I succeeded in adopting a very neutral tone so that people did not know what I was thinking or what my opinions were. In some cases, I suspect, respondents thought I was agreeing with them when in fact I was urging them to say more.

> ... short utterances with little content have the effect of encouraging the interviewee and reinforcing his desire to continue - "uh-huh", "hmm", "go on", "and then -", "so", "I see" ... They include nonverbal nodding (Kadushin, 1990: 126, see 126-8).

At times I found myself - for want of a better phrase - "warming towards" a respondent because I agreed with the views they expressed. In addition, there were instances, how often I cannot say, when I caught myself spontaneously making various facial expressions like frowning. I have no idea of the effect the latter may or may not have had.

All the questions I set out to ask were discussed although in a few instances I inadvertently did not ask a particular question. On occasion I departed from the guide questions listed in Appendix B when, depending on the reply I had

received, other questions occurred to me on the spur of the moment (see Ibid: 189-91 for a discussion on the use of different probes).

The points mentioned above in connection with possible distortion of the empirical material were, by far, the exceptions so that, as has already been stated, I do not believe that the data was generally and fundamentally distorted. This is further borne out by, as can be seen, the diverse nature of the material collected and the wide range of different points of view. It should, however, be noted (perhaps emphasized) that very often (for the most part, almost) I did not have eye-contact with the interviewee because I tried to write down in a notebook as much of what he/she was saying in order to facilitate the later transcriptions of the recordings. I do not know whether this can account for the observations and impressions I have made thus far. McCall and Simmons (1969: 73-4) point out advantages and disadvantages - they emphasize the latter - in taking notes while interviewing (see also Hammersley, 1979a: 140). Kadushin (1990: 213-5) also criticizes note-taking although he also points out that it can sometimes be useful; I merely cite some of the points he makes simply to alert the reader to the problem, rather than to discuss it in depth:

> If the interviewer looks down to write, he breaks eye contact, indicative of a shift in his field of awareness. His focus is

> generally on what HAS been said rather than on what IS being said. With the eyes of the interviewer on the writing pad, some possibly significant nonverbal information is lost (Ibid: 213, his emphasis).

He concludes that whenever there is conflict between the aims of the interview and taking notes, the former should enjoy preference. In all cases taking notes "should be done selectively, inconspicuously, flexibly and openly" (Ibid: 215).

It may also be important to state that trying to, inter alia, write down as much as possible of what respondents were saying undoubtedly led to what Pelto and Pelto (1978: 70) call "overgeneralized reporting". The following extract helps to clarify this shortcoming in the thesis:

| Vague notes | Concrete notes |
|---|---|
| A showed hostility toward B | A scowled and spoke harshly to B, saying a number of negative things, including 'Get the hell out of here Mr B'. He then shook his fist in B's face and walked out of the room (Ibid: 70, see 70-1; Spradlley, 1980: 68-9). |

Kadushin (1990: 290-2) discusses how interpreting body language can be used to highlight verbal responses. He

gives some very interesting examples, but also sensibly describes some of the problems involved in inferring too much from nonverbal communication. For the most part I ignored these "messages" altogether thinking that if I was going to have one eye on the interviewee and the other on the notebook, simultaneously trying to recall the interview literature and so on, it would be best to concentrate on the content of what was being said and not pay too much attention to any other behaviour. Below, I cite two examples of the use of nonverbal communication so that it can be seen how I could have enriched analysis of the interview material, but did not:

> She wants me to help with the shopping and watch the kids and clean the house. Hell, I work hard enough ... I don't want any of that crap (gestures with his right forearm, palm out, from his body outward, as though he were pushing it away).
>
> ... I know its wrong. Don't think I don't know that. I am not proud of it you know (corners of mouth turned up in what seemed a self-satisfied smirk) (cited Ibid: 292).

I set out in the ethnographic fashion to, above all, find out what the interviewees thought and not what I would have liked them to think. In this, I claim, I have succeeded. Back in 1922 the famous Malinowski described his task as "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize HIS vision of HIS world" (cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 63). (Cf. the following remark made by Whyte: "The great enemy of communication is the illusion of it",

cited in Kadushin, 1990: 30)). In this respect, the following extract may be significant, but again I should point out that I found nothing in the field to suggest that the observations made below were relevant to what I was trying to do (the opposite in fact, as I keep on saying). Nevertheless, it is true that I did nothing to test for the impact of "latent" and "manifest" content on the data gathered. On the other hand, the discussion in the introduction to Chapter 4 is relevant and should have gone some way towards addressing this problem.

| Manifest Content | Latent Content |
|---|---|
| Social Worker | |
| ... what brings you to the agency? | Black. Hope she won't think we're racist if we turn down her request, whatever it is. Hope it is something simple we can handle. |
| Client | |
| ... I have to go for an operation, and there's not going to be anybody to care for the kids because my husband works all day ... | Honky, always a honky. Can't I ever get to talk to a black worker? Is he going to think I really need this or is he going to give me all that "uh" "uh" and get my black ass out of here? What will the kids do then? I really got to sell this (from Kadushin, 1990: 32). |

I tried both during the interviews and when analysing the data to treat the sources and the information gathered critically and objectively. Sentiment regarding, for example, the maintenance of "friendly relations" by not pursuing sensitive or embarrassing questions, was as far as

it was humanly possible not allowed to become a distorting factor (see Hammersley, 1979a: 134). I profited greatly from Herbert Butterfield's advice with reference to historical writing:

> A Foreign Secretary once complained that, while he, for his part, was only trying to be helpful, Professor Temperley ... persisted in treating him as a hostile Power. Certainly it is possible for the historian to be unnecessarily militant ... [but] what a satisfaction it is to the student if he can be sure that his interests have been guarded with unremitting jealousy! And if we employ a watchdog (which is what the function of the independent historian would be expected to perform on our behalf), what an assurance it is to be able to feel that we are served by one whom we know to be vigilant and unsleeping! The ideal ... would certainly not be represented by the picture of a Professor Temperley and a Foreign Secretary as thick as thieves, each merely thinking the other a jolly good fellow; for the historian who is collecting the evidence ... must be as jealous and importunate as the cad of a detective who has to find a murderer amongst a party of his friends (cited by Becker in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 269).

Of the twenty-five interviews, eighteen were held at respondents' homes; one in an interviewee's office, one at the hostel where the interviewee was living and six at the school.

One interview had to be stopped before it was completed; its data has been ignored.

Fifteen interviews were conducted in English (Nawarda, Zelda, Abel, Mogamat, Rafieka, Tania, Marion, James, Helen, Rene, Shamiel, Fatiema, Ruth, Brian, Shanaaz) and ten (Paul, Avril, Adiel, Raymond, Ruwayda, Tania, Simon, Gregory, Louise, Lionel) in Afrikaans. All translations into English were done by me.

Questioning people about their political affiliations, especially when compared to questions such as "What happened at rallies?" or "Why did students boycott?" etc. could be seen, by some, as personal. I found that after, let us say the first ten or fifteen minutes, people were prepared to answer and say virtually anything and, as the interview progressed, very often appeared totally absorbed in what they were saying. There were a few exceptions: Fatiema gave what I thought were particularly frank and considered replies to all the questions, but when I questioned her about the negotiations between the ANC and the state and about present political developments, I got the feeling that she did not want to speak about this. Similarly Raymond also spoke very freely about virtually everything, but when I asked him whether he at present belonged to any political organisation he became hesitant and asked whether he really had to answer that question. But these were isolated incidents.

The first interview was conducted on 23 September 1990 and the last on 27 December 1990. On average about two or

three interviews were completed per week during this period. After each interview I listened to the entire conversation and again tried to write down as much as possible, including any impressions or other relevant comments. I made verbatim transcriptions of about half of the interviews and then decided to ask others to help with this murderous task.

Additional information regarding the actual guide questions used during the interviews and one or two of the techniques used can be found in Appendix B.

**SEMI-STRUCTURED, PERSONALISED INTERVIEWS VS. QUESTIONNAIRES**

Respondents can be questioned either by means of questionnaires or personal interviews. I opted for the latter method because the group of potential interviewees was relatively small, a wide range of topics was to be covered and, above all, I wished to probe respondents' meanings in as much detail and depth as possible. As can be seen from the range of topics covered (see Appendix B) it is doubtful whether respondents would have spent, say an hour and a half, to fill out answers on a form. The kinds of questions I intended to ask required explanations and illustrations and were not of the yes/no type. It was thus important that I was able to ask people to clarify aspects of their responses which I may not have understood or which

they may have expressed ambiguously (see Kadushin, 1990: 189-91). In turn, they also had the opportunity to ask me to clarify what I meant by the questions I asked if these had not been understood well.

Because on the one hand I wanted to probe, and on the other hand I wanted to cover the same topics with all the respondents, the interviews were semi-structured. Given the constraints on time it was impossible to cover all the relevant aspects. No doubt different analysts will regard different topics important for different reasons and as a result of different perspectives. I discuss this problem in Appendix B and in Chapter 6; here I simply wish to state that I decided to focus the discussion on certain aspects of the boycott only and hence the need for some kind of structure.

The intention was that the generalisations made of the group to be studied be representative of it. Personalised interviews could ensure this, whereas one of the acknowledged disadvantages of questionnaires is that the response rate is normally low. Furthermore, interviewing allows the researcher to "assess attitudes and opinions more readily, by recording non-verbal as well as verbal behaviour ... once rapport has been established, the interviewer is in a position to maintain it, thereby keeping the respondent interested until the end of the interview" (UCT School of Librarianship, n.d. 12; see also

Dean, J. P, et al in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 22-4).

As is shown in Appendix B, the order in which certain questions were asked as well as keeping respondents initially in the dark as to the purpose of the research are important aspects of the question design[1]; it is not possible to do this with a questionnaire.

**INTERVIEWING EX-SRC MEMBERS**

I decided to interview only former SRC members for two main reasons:

a) This organisation was supposed to have consisted of five executive members who were chosen at the beginning of the year plus two representatives from each of the thirty-two classes at our school. Since all the executive members, except one, acted as class representatives as well, it meant that in theory the SRC consisted of sixty-five persons. Given its small size and the limited time I had at my disposal as well as the fact that it was representative of all the classes and standards at the school, the SRC was particularly amenable to study.

b) In terms of political understanding and "level of consciousness", the SRC constituted a rather mixed bag. On the one hand there was a small group of students which was comprised of a minority of the officials and a minority of

the class representatives who generally performed the tasks expected of them and who, given their age and the relentless pressure of events, had exceptional leadership and organisational skills. This was partly because of their individual capabilities and partly because they functioned in a situation of acute social crisis and revolt. On the other hand, the SRC was often in a state of flux as far as its composition was concerned. Attendance at meetings as well as the degree of participation depended upon the prevailing circumstances and mood. More importantly, for the most part, it depended upon the level of political understanding and political commitment of the majority of the representatives. The latter were often criticised by the more conscious members for their lack of seriousness, for not doing a certain job simply because they did not feel like it, for not being prepared, for example, to stay after school "in the interests of the struggle" when everybody else had gone home.

All of the foregoing were based upon impressions I formed during 1985. They were not TESTED in any way before I started the the interviews (although they appeared to me to be confirmed during the course of the house visits and the initial brief chats).

The SRC could thus be seen as a small group, representative of the whole school which contained DIVERSE elements in so far as political understanding, involvement and commitment

were concerned. As the purpose was to evaluate the group as a whole it seemed necessary at the outset to try to establish the nature of the unevenness and "messiness" in consciousness which resulted from the meshing of the above characteristics. Besides, because the approach here claimed to be as unbiased as is possible, it was well that this assumption, i.e the DUAL nature of SRC consciousness was borne in mind as a kind of working hypothesis at the start of the research.

**SAMPLING THE SRC**

A representative, random sample of the SRC was taken using the following method: I interviewed respondents until no new forms of consciousness and no new categories of opinion emerged. After I had conducted twenty interviews I came to the conclusion that this point had been reached. I then did five more interviews and, while new factual material - only here and there - was still coming to light, no new views were recorded. I think that this method of sampling (as opposed to others based upon various statistical formulae - see Bernard, 1988: ch 4) is both appropriate and representative in terms of what is being investigated. Moreover, the diverse nature of the empirical data (see chapter 4 especially) which came to light as I was writing confirmed this view. However, this must be qualified in at least one important respect: some ex-SRC members either refused to be interviewed, or, I suspect, tried to avoid

me. The reason, I think, was that they were afraid to get involved in anything remotely political. I cannot therefore claim that their views are represented, but more about this later.

It has been mentioned that the SRC was fluid in composition. One problem which arose was to determine, five years later, who the representatives were. Very often members chopped and changed and I doubt whether there was a single SRC meeting at which only the elected representatives were present. Some classes had only one representative, most had two and a few three.

At first I thought that this would not be a problem: all I had to do was contact two or three persons I knew had served on the SRC and ask them to write down the names of all the others. This did not work. In the end an assistant telephoned persons who were likely to have been on the SRC and/or persons who possibly knew. When this task had been completed, I visited the persons on the list she gave me. I briefly explained that I was doing research on the 1985 boycotts, that I wanted to interview the 1985 SRC members and wanted to confirm that the person to whom I was speaking was an elected SRC member and did not just attend the odd SRC meeting. The whole process was extremely laborious and frustrating. In very many cases the person (if he/she was home!) stated that he/she had not been an SRC member. Often I was referred to someone else

who, in turn, referred me to someone else (who, as luck would have it, was not home!). In two cases I got the impression - it was just an impression - that the person I saw was not truthful about his/her involvement in the SRC, was somewhat suspicious and, it appeared, did not want to get involved in what was possibly regarded as a politically sensitive matter which could have who knows what dire repercussions. But, as mentioned earlier, these were exceptions. In the majority of cases the response was warm, friendly and co-operative.

These house visits produced, eventually, a list of sixty persons who in 1985 constituted the SRC. This list included one person who could not recall whether or not she had been elected but who attended meetings regularly and another person who said she was not an elected representative but also attended regularly and "spoke a lot". In addition, the following were included as well:

- one ex-SRC member who was in London; one who was a Roman Catholic priest ministering in rural Natal; one who was in Pretoria; one who was on a boat bound for the troubled Middle East and one who had gone missing;

- three former SRC members who, because they were hesitant and felt uneasy about being interviewed, I then persuaded not to agree to the interview. (One of these ex-pupils stated that she had written the final

examinations and had been called a "traitor" as a result. Another related that her husband did work of a sensitive nature in an (unmentionable?) state department. The third wanted very much to speak, she said, but feared that she would not be able to continue with her work as a result.);

- four ex-pupils who, according to other ex-pupils, were on the SRC but who were untraceable mainly because they had moved. I was unable to ascertain their new addresses;

- an ex-SRC representative who, armed with a map of Greater Cape Town, spent weeks driving around with me as we tried to trace potential interviewees. We spent so much time together and established such good friendly relations that I thought it would be better to exclude him. (The issue here concerns the danger of possible "over-rapport" - see Miller in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 87-9);

- an SRC member who established, it was widely alleged, a close liaison and "over-rapport" with the security forces at the time.

The sixty names including all of the names of the above individuals were placed in a suitable container. Each name was drawn and given a consecutive number so that each potential interviewee had the same chance of being drawn. I interviewed respondents in the order in which their names were drawn. When any of the ex-pupils mentioned above had

to be interviewed, I simply went on to the next consecutive number and name on the list. Working in this way, I came across a number of potential respondents who had at first agreed to be interviewed but, when the time came, were not available:

- one person had moved since I had first spoken to her; I could not ascertain her new address;

- one person changed her mind about the interview; she wanted, she said, to put it all behind her;

- two other people changed their minds about the interview - they did not give any reasons;

- one person was very keen to speak but I found it almost impossible, after repeated attempts, to arrange for a suitable time to conduct the interview. This was around Christmas I990. In the end I abandoned the idea altogether because there had been a death in the family;

- three other individuals failed to turn up for the interview at the times arranged. Subsequent attempts to contact them proved fruitless. The impression I got was that they tried to avoid me. One of them at one point questioned me carefully and was under the mistaken impression that I was going to write some kind of article for a newspaper. Would I mention her name?

In each of the above cases I simply interviewed the next consecutive person instead. As stated above, the sample is thus not representative of those individuals who later changed their minds about being interviewed or those whom I think tried to avoid me. The "New South Africa" is supposed to be a more "open" society where the long arm of the security police is (at least not legally) not supposed to be as active as it had been in recent years. Be that as it may, there are, nevertheless, many people who through ignorance, suspicion, fear and conservatism, simply "don't want to get involved" in anything that smacks of politics. School boycotts are, after all, associated with police action, detention, death and so on. I am, of course, speculating about these persons' motives - I cannot think of any alternative reasons[2] - and the circumstantial evidence does seem to support my deductions. Whatever their views may or may not be, they are not recorded in this thesis.

Of those whom I did interview, I did not, except perhaps at the start, notice any reluctance to speak; on the contrary there was on the whole an eagerness to relate events and opinions, far more so than I had expected. On a few occasions interviewees asked that I switch off the tape recorder when particularly sensitive or confidential information was related.

In 1985 there were five Std 6 classes, seven Std 7 classes,

eight Std 8 classes, seven Std 9 classes and five Std 10 classes at our school. Of the twenty-five respondents I interviewed, four were in Std 6, six in Std 7, six in Std 8, five in Std 9 and four in Std 10 during 1985. As can be seen above, the method of random sampling has not been stratified by standard or age. I have assumed that the SRC was homogeneous which was, of course, not the case. Apart from age there were differences in sex, social background, religion, language and so on. These differences may be important and relevant to the whole discussion. For example, Shanaaz told me that there were many students who knew very little about key aspects of the boycott. This did not apply to her, she said - and she was clearly correct - because of the political involvement of her family. On the other hand, Paul was and is politically apathetic. After the interview I spoke to his mother who worked in a factory. We discussed politics for a while and she was far more interested in, and clued up about such matters than her son. It is not the purpose of this research to analyse political consciousness in terms of differences such as these. On the whole, during the boycott, they appeared to be irrelevant and/or subsumed by other ostensibly more important and overriding concerns.

It is perhaps useful to state that by far the majority of pupils come from working class homes although the parents of a significant minority are middle class. I remember noticing at the time of the boycott that many of the more

privileged students often cut themselves off from the protests altogether. It is debatable whether these pupils saw their action(s) as political (or whether it was only the richer pupils who did this). They would often come to school for the sole purpose of finding out what the prospects of normal classes were and would leave soon afterwards. On the other hand, the most capable SRC leaders who were in the forefront of the whole thing (they were detained for their trouble and some were forced to flee the country) were female and came from the more privileged sections of the community.

**NOTES**

1. All research involves ethical questions of one kind or another. In this instance, the issue concerns researching/ analysing "subjects" "in secret". The question is far from simple. I have followed, and I agree with, the position argued by Julius Roth (in Filstead, 1970: 278-280; see also Hammersley, 1979a: 104-6).

2. Chris Argyris (in McCall & Simmons, 1969) discusses this problem. His arguments may very well be relevant but in this particular research I tend to think that reluctance to be interviewed was primarily related to the political causes which I have described.

**APPENDIX B**

**PERSONALISED INTERVIEWS WITH EX-SRC MEMBERS**

> Questioning is a much-abused art. It appears to be very difficult for interviewers to ask a clear, unequivocal, understandable question and then be quiet for long enough to give the interviewee an unhampered opportunity to answer (Kadushin, 1990: 191).

This Appendix focuses on the actual questions as well as some of the techniques used during the interviews. The reader can therefore gain some idea of how the empirical material analysed in the thesis was collected.

During an initial period which lasted only a few minutes, I tried to put the interviewee at ease and tried to create an atmosphere conducive to free discussion. I started the formal part of the interview by saying something like the following:

> I am doing research on the 1985 boycotts. I want to interview ex-SRC members from our school about the boycotts. [I then briefly explained how the random sampling worked.] Once I have completed all the interviews I want to do another series of discussions with the same people. I hope you'll be willing to be interviewed again? I do not want to tell you exactly what about the boycott I'm investigating because I do not want this knowledge to influence your answers in this interview. In the second interview I'll explain what I'm trying to find out and you'll be given the opportunity to comment upon my findings. Whatever you

> tell me is strictly confidential. I allocate a pseudonym to every person I speak to and if I use any of the information you give me, I'll refer to the pseudonym. I am the only person who knows I've spoken to you. Can I use a tape recorder? I don't think I'll be able to write down everything you say. Please do not mention the names of any teachers or pupils. If you want me to switch off the recorder at any time I'll do so.

I used the questions below as GUIDES to the topics and issues I wished to discuss with all the respondents. I did not pay too much attention to phrasing them in exactly the same way, although in most cases I did.

I tried to adopt as passive a role as possible unless certain points appeared to be particularly unclear. This was not always easy as it was necessary to prompt and jolt memories. There is, of course, a thin line which divides prompting from leading or suggesting particular responses. In all cases prompting was done only AFTER it appeared that interviewees did not fully understand the question; or (especially at the beginning) appeared somewhat uncomfortable; or were grappling with it; or could not answer; or had forgotten. I tried to make the prompts as neutral as possible, by and large, confining them to statements of fact concerning what had transpired, as opposed to pressurizing respondents into stating particular points of view.

As can be seen, in some instances, particularly where I tried to elicit opinions, I acted as Devil's Advocate and suggested opposing points of view (after Becker, 1970: 61; Strauss in McCall & Simmons, 1969: 71). Again the problem of putting words into people's mouths arises. Sometimes this was also done when respondents were at a loss for words; I then completed sentences for them. In such cases what was uppermost in my mind was to get to the bottom of THEIR meanings and what THEY were trying to say. In the case of playing Devil's Advocate the general result was not to formulate interviewees' views for them, but to elicit better responses of interviewees' own opinions. Kadushin's discussion on paraphrasing is useful (1990: 128-30); among other things he writes that these responses "are formulated as statements not as questions. The reflecting statements are affectively neutral, indicating neither approval nor disapproval. The interviewee's thinking ... should be reflected as much as possible in his own words" (Ibid: 130; see also the discussion on summarizing and recapitulation, Ibid: 130-1).

As can be seen below, the general idea was to first ask respondents factual questions like "What happened during the APs?" and then to ask questions which would elicit opinions about these topics.

The idea was to formulate "crisp, lean, clearly phrased, and focussed questions" (Ibid: 200). Reading through the

questions, especially the prompts, almost two years after they were first formulated, makes me wish I had rephrased some of them.

1. What about the boycott do you remember very well?

   Why do you think you recall this particular event?

2. What happened during the awareness programmes?

PROMPT: The SRC would normally arrange discussions, videos, etc. Classes would be grouped and teachers would supervise. What happened then?

Why were these programmes organised?

What was discussed?

Do you think students benefitted from these discussions and activities?

Did they learn anything or was the whole thing a waste of time? Why do you say so?

3. What happened at SRC meetings?

PROMPT: Normally SRC meetings were held to plan activities, to make decisions, organise mandates. Can you recall any specific SRC meeting(s) and state what happened?

4. From time to time students criticized the SRC. What did they say?

   From time to time teachers criticized the SRC. What

did they say?

PROMPT: They would, for example, say that:
the SRC did not organise things very well;
there was a lot of unnecessary chaos at the school;
the SRC was undemocratic and made decisions on behalf of everyone else;
the representatives who had to report-back to their classes did not do so properly so that people did not know what the issues were.

Were these criticisms valid?

Why?

5. What happened at rallies where pupils from more than one school got together?

PROMPT: There would normally be speakers, everyone would sing, some would toyi-toyi. The police were usually present. Can you recall any specific rally?

Why were these rallies held?

Were they successful? Why do you say so?

6. Did you attend any mass meetings in the area?

These would be meetings called by political organisations and would normally be held at night.

What happened?

PROMPT: What did the speakers say?
What was the response of the audience?
What decisions were taken?

What did you think of the whole thing?

7. Did you witness any violent incidents?

What happened?

Did you participate in any violent incidents? Why?

What happened?

Was it right that people used violence?

PROMPT: Should they not, perhaps have protested peacefully only?
On the other hand, some people said that much of the violence was caused by the police; if the state used violence we should also use violence.

8. Can you recall any incidents which took place in other parts of the peninsula?

PROMPT: Trojan Horse
Killing of Ebrahim Carelse
Detention of all the pupils at Zeekoevlei SS
10, 11 September strike

How did these events affect the situation at school?

PROMPT: Were students angry? Afraid?
Were they more determined to carry on with the boycott or did they feel the boycott should stop?

What did you think of these events?

How did they affect you personally?

9. What happened during the final exams?

PROMPT: Some pupils wrote while others did not.
Some teachers refused to have anything to do with the exams.
Some parents forced pupils to write.

10. What happened at the school in 1986 with the promotions?

PROMPT: Most of those who wrote the exams went to the next standard while those who did not write stayed in the same standard. What happened?

What did you think of the whole exam issue?

PROMPT: Were pupils right in writing the exams or did you think they should not have written the exams? Why?
Do you think everybody should have been promoted or not? Why?

11. Are you active in any political organisation now?

What work do you do in this organisation?

Would you say you were still interested in politics or not?

Do you think this is as a result of what happened in 1985? In what way?

12. How do you view the present political situation?

PROMPT: Are you in favour of the government or not? Why?

How do you see the talks between the ANC and the government?

13. What was the consumer boycott all about?

How was the consumer boycott promoted in the area?

At school?

What did the consumer boycott achieve?

Do you think it is a useful method of protest? Why?

14. Why did people march from Athlone to Pollsmoor?

Do you know what happened?

What did you think of this form of protest?

PROMPT: People, after all got hurt. Many did not go because they were afraid they would get hurt. Others were prepared to do anything, to die in order to resist the state.

15. Generally speaking what grievances did students have?

Why did they boycott?

Were these grievances valid?

Why do you say so?

16. The government eventually closed all the schools. Meetings were held throughout the Peninsula. There was a call that parents, teachers and pupils defy the closure of the schools and re-open them.

What happened?

Why was this call made?

Was the action successful?

17. There were a number of different political organisations in Cape Town like the UDF, the NUM, the CAL. These organisations were all opposed to the government but they differed among themselves. Can you explain what they differed about?

PROMPT: Eg. - Consumer boycott
- the duration of the school boycott
- SOYA vs UDF in WECSAC, ISCC

Do you think students were aware of these differences?

18. What role did parents play?

PROMPT: Did they support the boycott or were they opposed to it? How?
Were they successful?

Do you think they should have done what they did?

Why?

19. What role did teachers play?

PROMPT: Did they support the boycott or were they opposed to it? How?
Were they successful?
Do you think they should have done what they did?
Why?

20. Do you think the boycott was a good thing or a bad thing?

Why?

PROMPT: Look at all the pupils who were forced to leave school, who were shot, imprisoned, killed, who had to repeat the same standard ...

OR

Today Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners have been released. The government and the ANC are talking to one another. Everybody says there'll be a "new S. Africa". I'm sure the boycotts helped bring all this about?

21. From what you have said throughout the interview I take it that:

- you were opposed to the boycott?

OR

- you were in favour of the boycott?

OR

- you thought it was both good and bad?

Is this correct?

Was this your view at the time of the boycott? Has your opinion changed since 1985?

What has happened since 1985 to make it change?

22. Any questions? Comments?

An obvious problem which comes to mind is that I have

selected which topics were to be discussed. This was done on the basis of my reading of the literature describing the events of the boycott and after I had written a draft of Chapter 3 which described, chronologically, the principal occurrences of the boycott. I also wanted to limit the interviews to a maximum of two hours because sooner or later tiredness would take its toll. I asked respondents what about the boycott they remembered particularly well because I wished to check whether I had left out anything which they regarded as important. It turned out that I did. This data is summarized in Appendix C and its significance is discussed both there as well as in Chapter 6. Cohen (in Ellen: 225) says, "Were we simply to pursue a schedule of our own devising we should then merely be displaying the contrivances of our own minds, rather than discovering the minds of those we want to study". Also relevant is Kadushin's discussion on the advantages of open-ended, nondirective questions (1990: 183-4). He says, for instance, that:

> The interviewer may, as a consequence learn more of pertinence about the interviewee's situation than if she had asked a series of more closed questions. Much of interest and concern to the client may be missed because pertinent matters were not raised and the client had no autonomous opportunity to introduce them (Ibid: 183).

Kadushin does, however, note that time can be a problem with this approach. He also points out that allowing the

interviewee to, as it were, do all the work can be threatening and embarrassing, especially in cases where the respondent has little experience or competence in interviewing. Open-ended questions do not provide much guidance (Ibid). My experience was that in a number of cases respondents were very concerned, before the interview formally got under way, that they would not be able to recall or answer the questions put to them. My assurances that it did not really matter were of not much help because the first question - "What about the boycott do you remember very well?" - was off-putting because it was too unstructured and open-ended. It seemed that some respondents did not quite know what I was getting at. It would have been better if I had started with questions which were very easy to answer.

I regret the use of all the "why" questions and not heeding Kadushin's advise in this regard. He writes:

> It is difficult to formulate a question in "why" terms without suggesting overtones of blame. Reasons formulated in response to such a question may appear to the interviewee as answers submitted for evaluation. Do the reasons appear solid and acceptable to the listener? "Why" has a critical component as well as an information-seeking component. As a consequence, the interviewee may be prompted to respond defensively and focus contradistinctively on justifying rather than explaining the behavior (Ibid: 199).

He goes on to suggest alternatives to the use of "why":

whereas "why" implies "self-analysis"; "what" implies "explanatory description". It is therefore better to re-phrase "why" questions (Ibid).

Lastly, it should be noted that just like during the course of everyday life one can sometimes tell one's acquaintances and friends the most insulting things in a "nice way", thus not causing any offence at all, so it is important take into account the tone in which questions are asked during interviewing. If good rapport has been established one can ask respondents virtually anything. When studying the above list of questions the reader may, for example, get the impression that they could more usefully be employed in an interrogation than in a productive exchange to elicit opinion. The latter element was, no doubt, prevalent during the discussions. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case, provided there is fruitful and constructive interaction between respondent and interviewer and provided questions are asked in an appropriate tone. I of course would like to think that the latter was the case during the interviews I conducted.

**APPENDIX C**

**RESPONSES TO THE FIRST QUESTION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the first question - "What about the boycotts do you remember very well?" - was to see whether the questions I had used to structure the discussion left out any important areas or topics which should have been included. In other words, I wished to check whether my selection of what was important corresponded with those of the respondents. As has already been stated, the choice of questions used in all the interviews was decided upon after I had worked through the secondary sources and had written a draft of chapter 3. It turned out that for the most part I had covered those aspects which the majority of respondents viewed as most significant. There were, nevertheless, omissions which, had they been pursued, could have been very important in respect of modifying (or adding to, or subtracting from) the overall conclusions and findings. These omissions could also contribute generally to our understanding of respondents' actions at the time and their views now.

Again it must be stated that these issues cannot be solved absolutely because they depend upon how one interprets the key features of the boycott and what importance one

attaches to which events. It also depends upon what one is looking for and why.

**SUMMARY OF REPLIES**

Below I summarise the main responses I got to the question regarding what interviewees remembered best about the events of 1985.

Most respondents - sixteen altogether - referred to the mass meetings and rallies, and the violence and police brutality as the most outstanding features of the boycott.

"Being chased (laughs) ... being chased ... Casspirs ... Big vans and people being beaten up". She recalled a woman who was beaten up because students ran into her home and hid there; the troops with their "big guns" at the school during the final exams; the rallies, demonstrations, talks and discussions (Rene).

> ... I think boycott ... goes tantamount with that of barricading, of disruption, burning tyres, agitating, provoking ... police ... I remember one incident of tyre-burning ... and that still holds memory, that is the boycott (Mogamat).

Two ex-students described how a car belonging to a DEC official (a school inspector) was stoned when he visited the school one day; another related the following:

> ... the day when one of the Casspirs was turned over on one of the corners there and the police was just chasing us around and whoever they got, whether innocent or whatever, they just got a beating and got chucked into a van and I remember one of my friends got ... taken away in one of these Casspirs ... and when he came out a few weeks later he just explained how horrific it was ... it just aggravated the whole issue in myself ... [i.e. he became more militant]. They ... used him as a chair in the Casspir ... They made him crawl through their knees ... and as he crawled ... they physically abused him in whatever way that they could ... they put on teargas masks and they spray(ed) ... teargas ... and he had to suffer that ... (James).

Violence was often accompanied by fear, emotional stress and the tense atmosphere which prevailed:

> I got really scared that year, actually realised these people are hurting these students, and, I mean, you hear these stories all the time but now its actually happening to you and its quite scary (Fatiema, also Shanaaz).

And:

> Sleepless nights. You don't know when the cops will pick you up. Not sleeping at home (Tania, also Nawarda, Marion).
>
> I think the main fear was, 'Would I be arrested?' That was the main fear (Jane).

In the following extract fear is linked to age and the latter to understanding what was going on in what was often

a chaotic situation:

> It was scary because I was fourteen years old and ... I didn't know which way to move and whether I was doing the right thing. I was more accepting other people's word for what was happening but not understanding the situation clearly myself (Shanaaz; also Nawarda).

Apart from references to the rallies and the violence, there were a number of other replies as well.

Abel stated he was "amazed" at how organised students were at first and how disorganised they later became.

> [It was] something that couldn't go unnoticed ... throughout the Western Cape ... normally such ... a bond you'd find within a family, now you found it amongst people you hardly knew ... (Jane, also James, Helen, Raymond).

Related to this (and in contrast to the debilitating fear referred to above), there was the "feeling of strength" and the emotionalism expressed in slogans at mass meetings and rallies:

EW: What about the boycotts do you remember very well?

Brian: The most outstanding point ... was the unity of the students ... all the rallies I attended ... the rallies always stand out, when you're together, you singing, you shouting slogans, freedom songs ... the spirit, the power, man, the awesomeness ...

> going to different schools ... [you] met this one, you met that one ... it was very social, people getting together ... I really enjoyed the ... the rallies.

The unity and "feeling of strength" often found expression as "student power". One respondent stated that one day he dismissed the school at 12.15pm. "I said, 'I'm in control now. This is people's power, student power. We have the right to dismiss the school if we feel our programme have been exhausted'". Some teachers objected to the fact that he, a student, had done this and demanded that he apologise, which, he triumphantly recalled, he refused to do (Mogamat). Adiel, who was in Std 6 at the time, stated - the whole thing was probably all very new and novel to him then - one could come to school or leave whenever one wished; teachers had no say.

"The boycott gave me the ability to organise - formal schooling lacked that creativity". And, "I was able to address parents, students and teachers as equals, at, for example, PTSA meetings" (Mogamat). Adiel said he knew very little about the political situation in South Africa at that time but little by little, one learnt. "Every time you asked a question, you learnt something, you got more information".

In a negative tone: "What I remember the best was that we

did not achieve the aim of the boycott". It had started off in the Western Cape as a protest in solidarity with the revolt in the Eastern Cape but towards the end nobody knew what the purpose was. She said she had been "disappointed" in the whole thing (Avril). Abel referred to the fact that he was not allowed to return to school because of his involvement in the boycott as a "disappointment", while Helen (and Lionel) categorically stated the following:

> At the beginning of '85 a person had ... such a lot of dreams, that you finally made it to matric and you made plans for the future and it just didn't work out at all. Everything was just turned upside down, it affected my life actually very badly ... I'm still trying to reach the impossible dream of studying further.

Shanaaz said, "To a large extent we acted very irrationally at some stages ... A bit of good has come from the '85 but ... more good should have come from it".

Lionel, who was in Std 10 at the time, recalled the effect the boycott had on education as one of the things he remembered well. He wrote the final exams and his results were very poor. He would never forget the first day when it was announced that the boycott was about to start; it was on 26 July and "it was almost like a bomb which had fallen". The first thing his classmates wanted to know was how long would the boycott last.

Shamiel mentioned that one of the things he remembered best about the boycott was the fact that students who had written the final examinations joined in the protests the following year in the campaign against the DEC when it proceeded with legal action against teachers who had been charged with "misconduct". He had been surprised at this and described it as a victory.

Other points respondents mentioned, but did not really elaborated upon, were: the detention of teachers, there was an SRC meeting every day, sometimes lasting the whole day (Adiel, Fatiema); discussions, different opinions expressed (Marion). The formation of many organisations (Ruth), working in organisations (Rafieka, Ruth), pamphleteering, organised disruptions of schools (Rafieka), "staying out of school (laughing)" (Louise), disruption of the normal school programmes, missing out on schoolwork (Fatiema, Ruth), a placard demonstration (Nawarda), the bombing of the Manenberg police station and the arrests made in this regard (Gregory), the assistance given by individual teachers as well as the students who organised everything (Abel), the fact that students were very set in their ideas and that one got to know people as friends and comrades (Jane).

Rafieka: The fun.

EW: I beg your pardon?

Rafieka: The fun, it was a nice time (also Tania, Fatiema).

Zelda told of a demonstration held at the school on Kruger Day. There were about fifty people there. The police arrived and told them to leave. A teacher was subsequently detained.

Marion related in a shaky voice at times, her sister's detention and the effect it had on the family. When the police arrived at 4 am her sister was not at home (she was "on the run"), they detained her instead until they later tracked down her sister.

> ... only ... my parents could go and see her [but] they had to ... get permission. And that was, I think, once a week ... It actually affected us - how can I say? - like my mother was very upset and that because every time she would come home from seeing my sister ... she would ... be sick. My sister would tell her of the food they got. They weren't treated that bad ... and then they went [on a hunger] strike ... It was, it was hard for us because we didn't actually know she would come out after two weeks ... we never knew when she'd be out or anything ... It was hard for us.

**COMMENTS ON THE REPLIES**

What does the foregoing say about the themes explored in the thesis and those which have been excluded? On the one hand the question of whether or not people learn anything during the course of their participation in mass revolts and the fact that different individuals perceive the same events differently (that the boycott was not the same for everyone) so that, for instance, some people speak about it

positively while others view it negatively, are all themes which have been pursued in some detail. On the other hand, I believe areas which could turn out to be crucial have been ignored. Because they have been excluded I have no way of determining their importance in relation to what I set out to examine and in relation to the conclusions made in Chapter 6.

It appears that for almost all the respondents the boycott, first and foremost, equals rallies, violence, fear and/or unity, strength, "power". While it is true that I did cover some of these aspects in the interviews, what I did not include is the primarily psychological sense in which the respondents experienced the events and in which they referred to them. I do not wish to elaborate on a subject in which I have no formal training. A few points do, however, come to mind. The literature on student boycotts, like this thesis, has not only ignored the importance of psychological factors, one could almost say that their very existence has been denied. Trotsky, writing about the Russian revolution, says:

> In a society that is seized by revolution classes are in conflict. It is perfectly clear, however, that the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of the society and its social substratum of classes are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them. The dynamic of revolutionary events is DIRECTLY

> determined by swift changes in the psychology of classes which have already formed themselves before the revolution (1979: 17-8, his emphasis).

It occurred to me during 1985 that people's actions - whether to march or not; whether to support the strike or not - were determined, above all, by the prevailing climate or mood. This factor appeared to be vital especially to political organisations which sought to intervene and give direction to events: When is it appropriate to widen the scope of struggle? What actions will heighten militancy? When is it wise to retreat? (During those crowded months which led up to October 1917 the Bolsheviks generally used the replies they formulated to such questions to their advantage.) A fundamental characteristic of the uprising (which is almost impossible to capture five years after the event using interviews only) is that its features - the extent of student support for their SRCs, the degree and form of state repression, the extent of parental support and participation - were all in a state of flux. Like society generally. One is not, in other words dealing with a monolithic, static phenomenon with fixed features.

The boycott was BOTH a group and an individual, personal experience. I have regarded it primarily from the former perspective whereas it is necessary to stress that the latter frame of reference (as the extract by Marion above

indicates) can go a long way to explain and account for the views and insights of many respondents. Some students belonged to political organisations while others (the majority) did not, some were active in the SRC while most were not. Hence some students had easy access to certain information, opinions, etc. and had the experience of being involved in the life of a political organisation of which others knew nothing. Similarly, some students participated in violence, were beaten up, were detained, etc. while others did not actually live through such experiences. What I failed to do, therefore, was to evaluate consciousness in terms of such differing INDIVIDUAL experiences.

Age seems to be important as well. Apart from what has already been mentioned in the thesis one should, in addition, note that the perceptions of thirteen year olds and eighteen year olds, of those in Std 6 and those in Std 10, differ. Those who in 1985 were in Std 10 appear to have been far more concerned about their futures than the rest. Where the boycott adversely affected prospective careers, it is often, today, viewed in a negative light. I recall noticing at the time - I think many other teachers did so as well - that the younger pupils were more often than not motivated by emotion and that most of them had very little understanding of what was going on.[1]

These, then, are some of the more important issues not

really adequately analysed in the thesis and which arise from replies to the first question. They can all be reduced to one basic problem: how narrowly or broadly one defines "experience" in the context of the 1985 boycott. (I discuss this problem further in Chapter 6.)

Finally, there were those who perceived the boycott to be "fun" or as some kind of holiday. Clearly a significant group viewed it in this light. As we saw in Chapter 4, their actions had consequences which, according to some, contributed to the general chaos in a destructive way. How does one explain this? Ignorance? Age? It is likely that some pupils were very surprised when the police actually beat them and shot at them, despite the numerous reports their SRC gave them about what was going on and why they were protesting. How often (not always) did they not jovially march off to rallies in a festive mood and with a sense of adventure, until the security forces laid into them? But the same thing would happen again, sometimes the very next day. Yet I think that for the majority the boycott was a very serious affair indeed, as the evidence amply indicates.[2]

**NOTES**

1. During this period a colleague told me that during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Iran put fourteen year old "soldiers" in the frontline because, so the argument went,

boys of that age know no fear.

2. I am reminded of the many times some teachers anxiously rushed off to the local police station when it was learnt that pupils from our school had been detained, phoned lawyers, attended meetings, rallies or assisted with organising awareness programmes all the while wondering, as the number of detained teachers from our school ominously grew, which one of them would next be arrested. Others spent hours in the staffroom playing Scrabble and only wanted to know when they could go home - the Casspirs, wailing sirens, helicopters, burning barricades, etc. notwithstanding. Like the doormouse in Alice in Wonderland, they appeared to sleep through it all, oblivious of the world around them.

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**B. INTERVIEWS**

a) Interviews with eight teachers who in 1985 taught in the areas indicated in brackets as well as a former student who in 1985 studied at the University of the Western Cape:

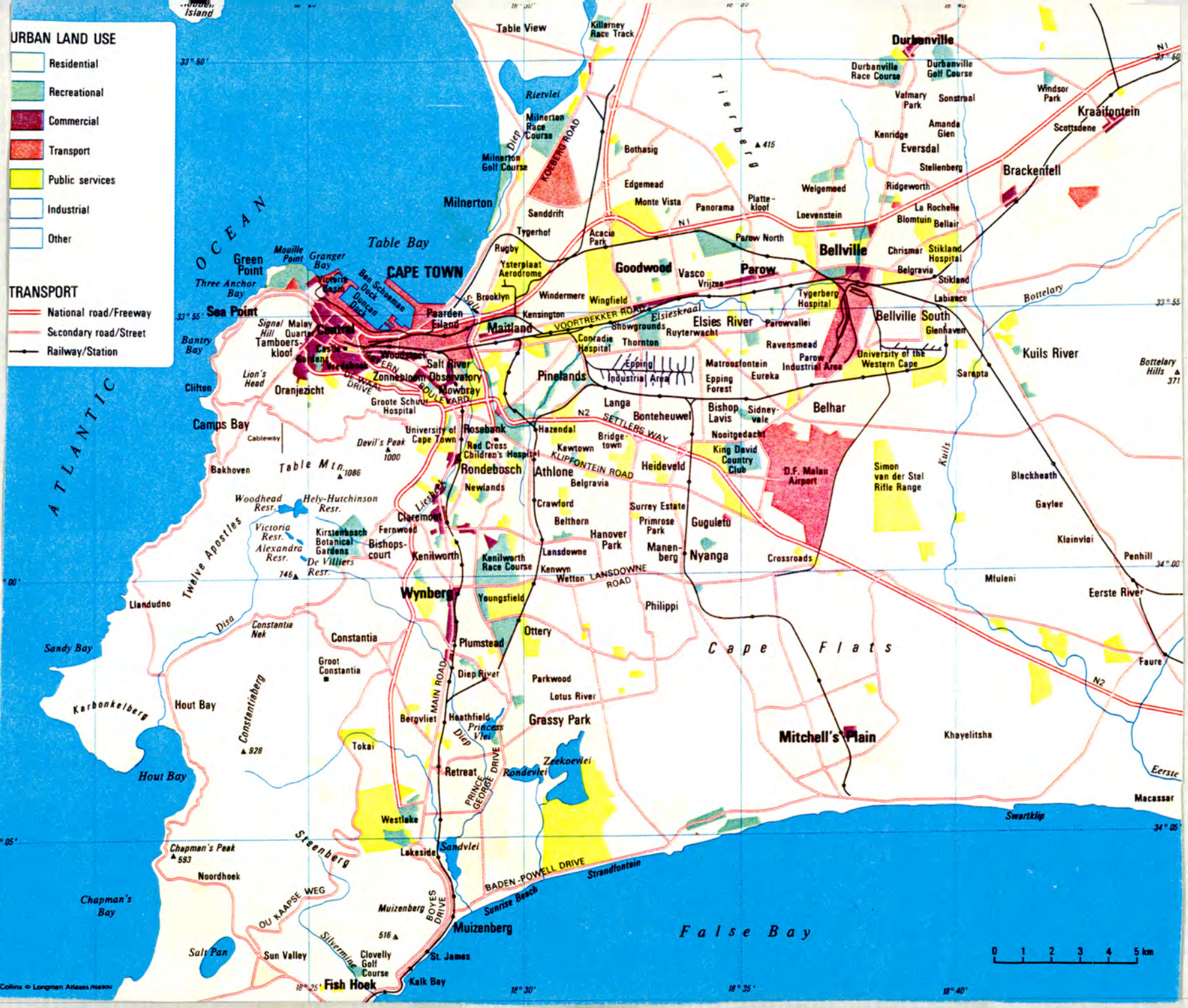
1. Anonymous (Bishop Lavis)
2. Anonymous (Bonteheuvel)
3. Anonymous (Heideveld)
4. Anonymous (Bellville South)
5. Anonymous (Belhar)
6. Anonymous (Elsies River)
7. Anonymous (University of the Western Cape)
8. Anonymous (Mitchells Plain)
9. Anonymous (Athlone)

b) Interviews with former SRC members. (The names below are pseudonyms):

1. Nawarda
2. Paul
3. Zelda
4. Abel
5. Mogamat
6. Avril
7. Adiel
8. Raymond
9. Ruwayda
10. Rafieka
11. Tania
12. Marion
13. Jane
14. James
15. Simon
16. Helen
17. Rene
18. Shamiel
19. Gregory
20. Louise
21. Fatiema
22. Ruth
23. Brian

24. Shanaaz
25. Lionel

The cassettes of the recorded interviews with the former students will be housed under closed access in the African Studies library, University of Cape Town, for the next ten years.




This map shows the locations of the Cape Peninsula's residential areas mentioned in Chapter 3. It has been reproduced from Longman/Nasou's Senior Atlas for Southern Africa, 2nd ed. Goodwood, 1984: 13.